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CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND LITERARY VALUE

First Series

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We apologize to our readers for not being able to bring out our issue last year. We would have liked this one to be a true joint issue. But not only have we not been able to increase our normal size but have been forced, for reasons beyond our control, to reduce it. Our apologies for that as well.

In this issue we are printing the first series of papers from the international seminar we held at the department under UGC sponsorship on 'Cultural Relativism and Literary Value' on 19-21 March 1987. The second series will be printed in the next issue. This series is being introduced with the inaugural address given at the seminar. And the following is a brief note on our authors for this series.

A major champion of Comparative Indian Literature, *R. K. Dasgupta* is the retired Tagore Professor of Bengali, University of Delhi and a former Director of the National Library, Calcutta. + *Douwe Fokkema* is a Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Utrecht, Netherlands and a former President of the International Comparative Literature Association. + *S. V. Pradhan* is a Professor of English Literature at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad. + A Reader in English at Himachal Pradesh University, *Jaidev* is at present a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. + *B.K. Tripathy* is a Professor of English at Berhampur University. + *Tan Chung* is a Professor at the Centre for Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. + *Andre Lefevere* is a Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Texas, Austin, USA. (Although at the last moment, for unavoidable reasons, he could not attend the seminar, he had sent his paper in time.) + *Ashok R. Kelkar* has recently retired from his Professorship at the Centre of Advanced Study in Linguistics, Deccan College, Pune.

A final word of apology for the inadvertent error in the title of Professor Pradhan's paper - 'implications' and not 'implication'.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND LITERARY VALUE

R. K. Dasgupta

[Inaugural address given at the UGC sponsored International Seminar on 'Cultural Relativism and Literary Value' held in the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, on 19-21 March 1987]

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Ladies and Gentlemen, I deem it a great honour to be asked to inaugurate this seminar although I don't know how I deserve it. I have had but a tenuous and intermittent professional link with comparative literature and this has created in me a curiosity about its scope and potentiality which I am afraid it is now too late for me to satisfy. I wish bodily decrepitude were really wisdom. But those of us who have not entered the many-mansioned house of comparative literature and have only wondered at its vast interior from its vestibule may have one advantage : they may talk about its great achievement and greater promise without being accused of professional conceit. For one thing I can express my profound appreciation of the quality of this Department of Comparative Literature without appearing to be vain about myself. This department is not only the first of its kind in our country's university system ; it is now a centre of teaching and research in comparative literature with an international standing. Its first professor and leader, Buddhadeva Bose, who was at once a creative writer and a scholar of great distinction, had that mastery of European and Indian literature which enabled him to give a new dimension and a new depth to the discipline. Most of the teachers of this department were his pupils and their work both in teaching and research has given it its leadership in studies in comparative literature in our country. Not a few of them received further training in their subject in reputed seats of learning in the United States and two of them were members of the Executive Bureau

of the International Association of Comparative Literature for six years each. The department's journal is now one of the finest of such journals in the world.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, taking over the charge of this university you have been taking tender care of its faculties concerned with the humanities in your endeavour to give a new life to this institution and this has raised high hopes in us about the future of this department.

The subject of this seminar—Cultural Relativism and Literary Value—is indeed a basic concern of comparative literature as the discipline has developed in the last hundred years. It is time that our comparatists raised a fundamental question such as this if only to define their goal and to identify the tools and procedures of their work. And the organizers of this seminar have raised that question.

Relativism is now a very important concept of philosophy : obviously the importance derives from the theory of relativity. Relativism is defined as the view that truth is relative and may vary from individual to individual, from group to group, or from time to time, having no objective standard. The doctrine has been applied to epistemology epistemological relativism being the theory that all human knowledge is relative to the knowing mind and to the conditions of the body and organs. It is therefore a subjective theory of knowledge. Ethical relativism is the theory that ethical truths are relative, that the rightness of an action or the goodness of an object depends on or consists in the attitude taken towards it by some individual or group and hence may vary from individual to individual or from group to group. Cultural relativism will then be the theory that there may be various forms of culture amongst various peoples and that their quality cannot be judged by a single absolute standard.

When St Paul said that his new message would be foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews he believed in an absolute moral and spiritual standard. He could not foresee that his new message would be sustained by the old pagan philosophy of Plato and Aristotle : that the bleeding feet of Christ would one day be illumined by the light of Apollo.

The Graeco-Roman-Judaic-Christian culture of the West has still a measure of this Pauline idea of absolutism in its approach to human values. When Arnold Toynbee upbraided the western man with what he called his intellectual provinciality he meant this idea of a standard culture which negated the idea of a variety of cultures.

As Cassirer said, the "philosophic study of culture is the youngest amongst the disciplines of philosophy" and I think comparative literature and comparative religion may make a very large contribution to the growth of a philosophy of culture. For literature including the scriptures is the most authentic document of culture.

I think the idea of a single ideal literary culture has been nursed and kept alive by the idea of classicism in letters. By and large this classicism does not mean a love for the Greek and Latin classics both : it is an exclusive love for whatever is Hellenic. About classical Rome Clive Bell says that "in her literature, art, thought and general culture we find nothing of value which is not a dull echo of Greece." Even Virginia Woolf says that "we turn to the Greeks when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age." Gilbert Murray had none of the arrogance of those Europeans who spoke of a White Man's burden in the world's intellectual advance : he was too civilized and too gentle for that. But even he once remarked that "the Western Community ... is, in virtue of its Hellenic and Christian heritage, called upon to lead the world."

I now recall how my own studies in English literature in the university were flawed by the excessive Hellenism of my teachers. In the lectures on Aristotle's *Poetics* we were told that the truly tragic tear was a Greek tear and in other classes too we were taught to believe that in art as in letters a "fair attitude" would necessarily assume an "Attic shape".

To come closer to the business of comparative literature we remember Goethe's ecstatic response to *Śakuntalā* which he immortalized in a quatrain. This was in 1791. In 1826 Goethe said about Sanskrit in his letter to his friend Humboldt that "we who read Homer as our breviary and who dedicate ourselves with heart and soul to Greek sculpture as the most perfect incarnation of God on earth, that we enter with a kind of uneasy fear those limitless spaces where monsters obtrude themselves upon us and deformed shapes soar away and disappear." This is not a European's pride in his own culture : this is a great European's failure to realize that there could be a culture other than the European. And it was a failure on the part of "Europe's sagest head" who was the first to spell out the idea of a world literature.

But does the idea of relativism in culture as a determinant of literary value really negate the idea of world literature, that is, the idea of a possible universal appeal of any particular literature ? When we explore

the history of the idea of relativism we meet with a pre-Socratic sophist, Protagoras, who makes that relativism of which he is the first proponent in western thought, the foundation of a doctrine of individualism. It is a pity that all his works are lost and his ideas survive only in some fragments. His most memorable statement that "man is the measure of all things" is a great deal more than a dictum of Greek humanism : for here man does not mean mankind, *genus homo*, but the individual man. This may lead to anarchism, absence of any principle of spiritual and moral coherence essential for a society or a civilization. But it is of vast importance as a doctrine favouring the individual's liberty to be himself. And according to Protagoras man knows only what he perceives and this perception is independent of the thing perceived of which there cannot be any sure knowledge. This is scepticism, but only such scepticism can free man from dogmatism. If the individual is free to be himself, when such individuals, under the plastic stress of historical forces, form themselves into a race or nation that race or nation has the right to be itself, develop its own value-system, its own culture and its own literature. It is not obliged to conform to any ideal type of culture. For there can be no such ideal type in a universe where values are relative and not absolute. And it cannot do so without losing the truth and the power of its own being. If at any time it absorbs a value of another culture it does so according to the laws of its being and it then ceases to be an alien element because it then enters into its very blood stream. Those of us who believe that the Italian Renaissance was only a reincarnation of the classical ideal misunderstand the Italian Renaissance and classical antiquity. The most outstanding contribution of Burckhardt to our understanding of the Italian Renaissance is how he has shown that it is not really a return to the past.

Relativism does not repudiate the idea of a literature gaining a universality. It only affirms that all literature has a local habitation and an identity of its own, that it gains its universality because of its individuality. Herder is a relativist when he says that "in the kingdom of mankind that which will come to pass under given circumstances of nationality, time and place will come to pass." And Herder found in this flowering of an individual culture the promise of a plenitude of values and ideals which can only enrich the world's intellectual life. When Taine stressed the omnipotence of the environment in literary creation he meant to bring out the individuality of a national literature. But even as a relativist Taine

has shown in his history of English literature the capacity of that literature to reach a height which makes it a precious treasure of the world.

I think amongst the thinkers of our time it is Cassirer who has reflected upon cultural relativity in its bearing on the idea of the universality of human value. He has drawn our attention to Humboldt's philosophy of the individual as a component of the universal. Summing up Humboldt's ideas on this question Cassirer says : "All historical life is nationally conditioned and limited ; but in this very conditioning, indeed, by virtue of it, it exemplifies the universality, the unbroken oneness of the human race." While individuality or relativity is a fact, universality is a possibility. But we may lose the living touch of this individuality in our search for a homeless universality. T. S. Eliot warns the European against such pursuit of abstract, bloodless universality when he says that "if separation of cultures within the unity of Europe is a danger so also would be a unification which led to uniformity. The variety is as essential as the unity." The relativist defends this variety without denying the value of unity. Cultural relativism is then the ground of comparison in comparative literature.

With these words I have great pleasure in inaugurating this seminar and I wish it all success.

TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY IN INTERCULTURAL STUDIES

Douwe Fokkema

The topic of cultural relativism implies a number of very complicated but at the same time challenging problems. Let me first briefly discuss some of the entanglements we are in, now that we have decided to participate in this seminar on "Cultural Relativism and Literary Value", convened by the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University. When I have done that, I will turn to some epistemological issues in the cross-cultural study of literature, to a discussion of method and its legitimation, and, finally, to the problem of evaluation. This is quite a programme and we can be easily overwhelmed by it. However, I hope to convince you that these things *can* be discussed within the restricted amount of time we have.

In his kind invitation to this meeting Professor Amiya Dev wrote: "The days of cultural complacency are over. No more can we be content with a self-ascertained sense of cultural superiority." These words suggest that the discussion of cultural relativism has a moral basis. Feelings of cultural superiority are supposed to be bad. Modern life calls for a particular action: we *should* get rid of our feelings of superiority, and we *should* learn to understand other cultures. Immediately I wish to let you know that I agree with this moral dictum, but I also want to emphasize that it indeed is a moral exhortation, an exhortation based on an ethical—and perhaps also political—value judgement. The call for getting rid of cultural superiority feelings issues from a value judgement which by definition cannot be universally valid. There is no compelling logic which tells us that cultural complacency is false and cultural relativism is right. At most we may say that in a certain context cultural complacency is bad and cultural relativism good. Cultural relativism, as I have written earlier,

“is not a method of research, even less a theory : it refers to a moral stance which may influence the scholar in his selection of research methods and theoretical positions” (Fokkema 1984 : 239). This explains the entanglement we are in : we wish to have an intellectual and academic discussion, we wish to develop means for increasing our knowledge of literature, including literature in distant cultures, but we start out from a moral position. Can we keep the two apart ? Can we distinguish between knowledge and valuation ?

I believe we can, and I would suggest that, for clarity's sake, the distinction should be made. Following Nicholas Rescher (1969), we may describe a value judgement as being motivated by the interest of a subject who is to act or has acted, and therefore as a proposition that in principle is not universally valid. Propositions expressing empirical knowledge, however, do not imply action and are not necessarily linked to subjective interests ; they are propositions which in principle are universally valid. Therefore, it is worthwhile to bring this sort of knowledge together in publications which receive a wide distribution, e.g. encyclopedias. Value judgements can be found in other media, such as literature and the other arts, and in literary criticism. I cannot but conclude that not only philosophers but almost anybody can make a distinction between the presence of a thing and the value of a thing. We are all familiar with the possibility that two people agree about the presence of a thing but at the same time disagree over its value. In practical life (e.g. in any market place) people know how to distinguish between facts and values ; in scholarly discussion we may meet complications but also have the instruments (such as precise language) to overcome these complications and to work on the basis that a distinction can be made between propositions concerning facts and propositions concerning values. The distinction to be made does not exclude the possibility that one and the same person may switch easily from the one kind of propositions to the other and back. It is perfectly defensible that our discussion of intercultural studies has a moral impulse. The thing that is indefensible, however, is to let our moral impulse interfere with the rules of analytical argument or scientific exploration.

With these words I hope to have disentangled some of the complicated issues at stake. There are more complications, such as the richness and variety of the great cultures we will refer to. Personally, I feel overwhelmed by the greatness of the Indian cultural heritage of which I know so little and which I will never be able to grasp within my lifetime. This,

too, is an important complication, and a warning at the same time : the variety of Indian culture, with its various distinct traditions, makes it almost impossible to speak of *one* Indian culture, except if a considerable amount of simplification is admitted.

I see a methodological problem here : are we to postulate one Indian culture ? And if we want to do so, how do we proceed from its manifold manifestations to the one abstract notion of one Indian culture ? The same applies to other cultures, of course, including European culture.

In scholarly discussions, I fear, we cannot avoid certain simplifications. But as long as we know *that* and *how* we are simplifying, we still may reach some valid results. I am not afraid of simplification, but would always argue in favour of "controlled simplification" (Fokkema 1964 : 249). Those who are afraid of any simplification are bound to identify themselves with the complex totality of their object of investigation — a text, for instance — but will not be able to talk about it except by repeating the words mentioned in that text. I am not convinced that the mere repetition of an object of investigation is capable of adding anything to our knowledge. I would rather venture that simplification — the recoding of a text by means of an external analytical instrument — is a basic condition for acquiring knowledge. In my view, additional knowledge can be acquired only if it can be matched with knowledge that we already have. New data must be made amenable to connect with the data that are already in our memory, but new data which are completely disconnected to the knowledge we possess cannot be assimilated. This is what both *didactics* and *neurology* have taught us.

I cannot but conclude, on the one hand, that the rejection of all simplification necessarily leads towards complete identification, implying mechanical repetition or mystical silence. On the other hand, the acquisition of new knowledge depends on controlled simplification, on carefully designed analytical instruments, or simply on very precise questions, which emanate from the older knowledge that we — however tentatively — have. Controlled simplification requires precise linguistic expression and provides a basis for a thoughtful dialogue. For, when I have misunderstood a text from another culture and have given expression to my interpretation, I can be corrected by others who phrase their critical comment, and so on.

Legitimations of method

I am supposed to speak on the methodology of intercultural studies. Before going into the problem of method, it is perhaps necessary to say a word on the difference between intercultural and intracultural studies—the study of literature originating in different cultures and the study of literature produced within the boundaries of one culture.

First, the notion of the extension of a culture is problematic. The term 'culture' is variously applied. One may say that each nation, each class, or even each person has his or her own culture. Within the context of this paper I would propose to reserve the term 'culture' for large, primarily geographical zones coinciding with continents or, for that matter, subcontinents. As a consequence, it would be warranted to speak of Indian culture, European culture, Chinese culture, Latin American culture, etc. Intercultural studies would comprise, among other things, the comparative study of literature across cultural boundaries.

If we assume that we vaguely know what these abstractions of Indian, European, Chinese cultures refer to, there is still the question as to the extent the comparative study of literature *within* one cultural zone differs from the comparative study of literature *across* the boundaries of cultural zones. In both cases there will be distance between the researcher and his object of investigation. The distance may be large, both in *intracultural* studies and in *intercultural* studies. European scholars studying the work of Chaucer or Chrétien de Troyes must bridge an enormous historical distance, in fact also a cultural distance, which is certainly not smaller than the distance they have to cover when studying more or less contemporary writers who have lived at a considerable geographical distance, such as Rabindranath Tagore or Kawabata. The cultural distance between the researcher and the object of examination can be enhanced by historical, geographical and social factors. It is not at all self-evident that the cultural distance between a researcher and the object under examination is larger in the case of *intercultural* studies than in *intracultural* studies. And, what is more important, even if this were the case, the difference between a large and a small cultural distance is only a matter of degree. Therefore, already many years ago Jan Mukarovsky suggested that, in principle, there is no difference between *interliterary* and *intraliterary* comparison (cf. Durisin 1974 : 94). Whether the cultural distance to their object is large or small, researchers must apply analytical instruments, must ask questions, and must search for answers which are bound to

simplify or even distort the material under examination ; in short, they will begin a dialogue which will be continued by other scholars, some of them living in another cultural zone.

Why do we attach value to the cross-cultural dialogue in scholarly matters ? The answer to that question is simple. In the empirical study of literature we have the pretension to produce statements that are universally valid. Therefore, we want to defend our views across cultural boundaries and welcome criticism from scholars educated in quite different cultural surroundings. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1978 : 19) was certainly right in postulating that "the human mind is everywhere one and the same and that it has the same capacities" ; although we may wonder whether this can be true without exception, or how this important statement can be tested. As a *postulate* it is the preliminary condition of an intellectual debate across cultural boundaries.

All research — also in the field of literature — may begin with vague intuitions or speculations, but will then go through a stage of conceptualization, in order finally to produce propositions which can be tested and, if they have withstood pertinent criticism, can be held to be tentatively true. I subscribe to Popper's view that, in principle, there is *one method* in scientific research. The term 'scientific', if applied to the sphere of the humanities, is somewhat problematic in English (though not in German, Russian, Hebrew or Dutch), but this bothers me less than the much more important problem of how propositions can be tested — which amounts to the question of the legitimation of judgements on the correctness or validity of so-called scientific propositions.

I am fully aware of the complications here, of the arguments advanced by sociologists of knowledge or postmodern philosophers such as Lyotard (1979), and yet I am convinced that if we wish to have scholarly discussions across national and cultural boundaries, we need common standards for distinguishing between correct and false, between valid and invalid propositions. The question then is : What are our criteria of scientific validity ? We need to solve that epistemological problem if we want to be taken seriously by our colleagues in and outside the humanities. If we do not go into this epistemological problem, we will run the risk of falling victims to any new and fashionable trend that may arise. Indeed, it is embarrassing to see that after short intervals of ten or twenty years our discipline seems to enter a totally new paradigm : after positivism we saw the rise of New Criticism and structuralism, which were succeeded by

deconstruction and post-structuralism, and these again seem now to be replaced by a new historicism. What we need in our discipline is the continuity of reliable results. The empirical study of literature aims to produce such results, i.e. propositions which can be tested and, if they have withstood sustained criticism, are to be added to the stock of provisionally accepted hypotheses. It is a serious weakness that apart from the accumulation of simple facts in biographies and encyclopedias, literary studies lack continuity. Each new generation feels the urge to produce new concepts of literature, new theories of literature. To some extent a criticism of the results of earlier research is of course necessary, but is it necessary to start time and again from scratch ?

It seems that there are three main criteria for judging scientific propositions. First, there is the well-known view that a scientific proposition is correct and valid if it corresponds with the empirical facts it purports to describe. The proposition is legitimized by the criterion of *correspondence* with the facts. Secondly, a proposition can be considered valid on the basis of its being in agreement with theories that are held to be correct. Here the proposition is legitimized by the criterion of *coherence* with accepted theories. Thirdly, a proposition can be considered valid on the basis of agreement among a particular community of scholars. Now the proposition is legitimized by the criterion of *consensus* (cf. Rescher 1973 and Kriz 1985 : 8).

Things become rather complicated, however, when we realize that, as a rule, none of these three criteria alone is sufficient to legitimize scientific propositions. They are operative in conjunction, although usually one of them is emphasized in particular. For a long time the correspondence criterion has been held to be a sufficient means for establishing the validity of scientific propositions. Recently, however, in discussions about the possibility of testing the correspondence of propositions with empirical facts, it has been pointed out that there is no such thing as direct, naive observation, and that there is a tension between the idea of a mental frame guiding the researcher's observations and the desirability that facts also should be recognized if they do not fit into the pre-existent mental frame. My compatriot and colleague J. J. A. Mooij (1979) discussed the issue several years ago. In recent publications the import of the mental frame or guiding theoretical conceptions has been heavily emphasized at the cost of the significance of direct observations. For instance, Siegfried Schmidt, whose theories are professedly empirical, seeks support in the

coherence of theoretical conceptions that are subscribed to by a community of researchers and therefore are called "intersubjective", rather than in the direct observation of facts (Schmidt 1980:6-7 ; cf. Finke 1982 : 108-16). In fact, Schmidt emphasizes both the coherence and the consensus criterion. One or two out of the three major kinds of legitimation may be pushed into the foreground, but one could argue that we get close to *optimal* legitimation only if all three kinds of legitimation apply. Such an argument will probably seek support in social practice ; when looking for certainty, people highly estimate an appeal to facts, as well as to coherence and consensus.

Allow me to elaborate on this. In my view, an appeal to either empirical facts alone or to a coherent theoretical system subscribed to by a community of scholars cannot be convincing. If one would maintain — in spite of Gombrich's argument (quoted by Finke 1982 : 111) — that it is possible to observe isolated facts, one would yet have to admit that, as soon as these facts are related to each other, an element of interpretation is introduced based on concepts of causality and the theoretical positions accepted by a particular community. The naive reliance on so-called facts alone does not result in valid propositions. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to rely exclusively on the criteria of intersubjectivity or the coherence with established theories. For reasons of self-interest or indolence, or for other reasons, a community of scholars may wish to protect itself against criticism. If there is to be a progress in scientific research, criticism must be heard and new facts investigated. Therefore, the possibility of an open discussion is a precondition for scientific research.

There is more to say on the triangle of correspondence, coherence and consensus by which the validity of scientific propositions is hedged in. In certain disciplines one of these forms of legitimation is more adequate, and therefore more popular, than in others. In experimental physics the criterion of correspondence with observed facts is rather important. Theoretical physics, however, relies very much on the criterion of coherence with established theories. In the humanities, intersubjectivity or consensus among a community of scholars has often been considered a sufficient legitimation. However, as argued above, the other criteria cannot be ignored. The experimental physicist cannot ignore the criterion of theoretical coherence, nor can the theoretical physicist refuse to take notice of the one or two successful experiments in his field. Likewise, the student of literature cannot rely on consensus alone ; the New Critics

and structuralists who did that entered a blind alley without being aware of it. Again I wish to emphasize that scientific propositions are stronger and have a greater survival chance when they are variously supported by all three possible kinds of legitimation.

The findings of students of literature may become more reliable and, as a result, the study of literature may acquire a greater continuity, if scientific propositions about literature and literary communication will be supported not only by consensus, but also by correspondence with empirical facts and by coherence with accepted theories. And if this cannot be immediately materialized, the relative validity of our propositions can be established by the degree in which the criteria of correspondence, coherence and consensus have each been respected. The validity of our propositions in the field of literary studies can be expressed in terms more or less of support in empirical research, in theoretical coherence and in backing by a community of scholars.

In order to avoid the inadmissible protection of tentative scientific propositions, the wall separating the humanities and the social sciences must be torn down. Intersubjectivity is different from consensus within a *cénacle*, and, in order to prevent the immunization of intersubjectively held beliefs, the testing of scientific propositions must have an interdisciplinary dimension (Schmidt 1980 : 2-3). The observations of the student of literature on stylistics, the aesthetic experience, or social relations among writers and readers should be open to criticism by linguists, psychologists and sociologists respectively. When these observations have withstood a possible criticism from the point of view of other disciplines, they can be used by scholars working in these other disciplines and contribute to our general knowledge of man and society. *Intersubjective* testing will liberate literary studies from the image of being based on personal convictions. *Interdisciplinary* testing goes one step further ; it will—now from various points of view—separate reliable from unreliable results and make the reliable findings accessible to the general public. As such, it extends the range of intersubjective testing and relieves literary studies from their image of elitist isolation. Finally, *intercultural* testing—the worldwide testing of results which have remained too long within the boundaries of one culture—may provide the pretension of universal validity with a basis. Intercultural testing may emancipate literary studies from their possible ethnocentric bias. As a result, the range of intersubjectivity will reach global dimensions.

The choice of analytical instruments

Admittedly, the preceding observations have the character of prolegomena, preliminary observations before our research is to begin. In my view, all research begins with a problem or a question, whether simple or complex. And if the research that is planned is to have a scientific value, it must be related to problems that are in discussion but that have remained unsolved so far. Such problems are considered to be scientifically relevant.

One way of connecting with current research is to investigate aspects of literary communication, such as were distinguished by Felix Vodicka (1942) and Roman Jakobson (1960). This can be specified as research with regard to (a) the production of texts with a literary intention—wherever in this world, (b) the literary reception—wherever in this world—of texts irrespective of whether or not these texts have been produced with a literary intention, (c) the distribution of texts intended for literary reception—including the distribution outside the cultural zone where they were produced, (d) the analysis of texts which by particular segments of the reading public—wherever in this world—have been received as literature, (e) the codes which can be construed in function of an explanation of how the understanding of texts accepted as literature by a particular reading public—again, wherever it may live—is possible (cf. Fokkema 1987). This is not only a comprehensive but also a very ambitious programme. I mention it to show that we may construe an object of really global magnitude, transcending cultural boundaries. In fact, it is a programme sufficient to satisfy the scientific curiosity of large teams of scholars in many places in the world.

It may be more attractive to stake out a less comprehensive problem, for instance, the comparison of explicit poetics—i.e. the comments of writers on their own literary production—in the various cultural zones. An Arabic poet has compared a poem with a tent. An old Chinese treatise on poetry characterized it as a tissue or texture. In the Persian tradition the poem is a storehouse of secrets (Idema 1983). Would the conclusion be warranted that in several Asian traditions the literary text has been conceived of as a 'construction'—for a tent, a tissue and a storehouse are constructions—precisely as was emphasized later by the Russian Formalists? One remembers Jurij Tynjanov's definition of literature "as a language construction which is experienced as a construction" (trans. from Tynjanov 1924 : 406-7). My enumeration of the metaphors of poetry, however, was rather selective. I ignored the comparison of the poem with

a precious stone, a golden coin, sugar, honey et cetera. And yet it would be interesting to bring the metaphors of poetry in the various traditions together and to analyse them, perhaps not with the aim of discovering one or two common semantic features, but getting some grip on the differences between the literary traditions in the various cultural zones.

A recurrent problem in intercultural studies is the question of which corpus of texts—both oral and written—should be examined. Of course, the problem occurs in *intracultural* research as well, where the extension of the literary domain is quite an issue, but in the comparison between literary traditions in different cultures there is a confusingly large range of options. It seems that the farther we go back into history, the greater is the chance that literature is conceived of as being equal to all texts that have been handed down by tradition. This seems to apply at least to China where in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong*), written in the early sixth century, all sorts of genres are discussed which at present, also in China, are no longer considered to belong to literature—such as the treaty, the epitaph, the philosophical argument and the declaration of war (cf. Liu Hsieh). Here we see a historical development from an early concept of literature comprising many different kinds of texts to a modern concept of literature accommodating a less wide range of genres. Perhaps the historical development from a broader concept of literature to a narrower one is a universal phenomenon, applicable also to India.

The different range of the concepts of literature in different cultures and different times is a complicating factor in intercultural research. However, it is a difficulty that can be overcome and indeed can be reduced to harmless proportions if one is merely aware of it. Perhaps one of the most interesting research topics nowadays is the question of how the domain of literature has been staked out, and which factors have determined the shape of the literary system. In the modern western tradition the idea that literature is a precarious product of convention and innovation has found a considerable support. Supposedly, the text must induce both recognition and surprise. It must be relevant to the life-world of the reader, and it must allow for a new outlook on things. The ideal combination of relevance and innovation leads towards an aesthetic or a literary reception of a text. This means that the definition of literature cannot be given in the abstract, but must refer to a specific communication situation and a specific reader, for it is the reader who is to judge whether he or she con-

siders a text relevant and innovating. Both relevance and innovation are relative concepts, shifting with the position, knowledge, interest and emotional constitution of the perceiver.

In modern reception theory these notions have been elaborated, and the findings of reception theory may be also interesting for scholars outside the European tradition. In Indian poetics as well, the role of the erudite reader or critic—the *sahṛdaya* or *rasika*—was emphasized. I would be curious to know whether the function of the *sahṛdaya* in fact points to a concept of literature that respects the judgement of the addressee. In any case, the examination of the function of the *sahṛdaya* and other forms of literary criticism, in Indian and other traditions, may bring us closer to an understanding of the workings of the literary system in the various cultural zones. So far about the analytical or empirical study of literature.

Value judgements

Whereas in the preceding argument I have emphasized the perspective of the universal validity of propositions, now I wish to focus on propositions of subjective, restricted validity, i.e. value judgements. I believe that the value judgement with regard to texts is very much linked to the necessity of protecting oneself against being overwhelmed and paralysed by the constant flow of information. If we have a sense of purpose and want to use our time well, we must distinguish between information which we like or can use and information which is merely superfluous or even an obstacle. Our selection of texts will be guided by the purpose we have in mind, or by the criteria related to that purpose. It is evident that you and I do not necessarily have the same goals, neither in practical life nor in literary studies. Therefore, it would be wrong to force each other to adopt the same criteria in selecting literature for our own use or for educational purposes.

You and I are living in different circumstances ; each of us has a different past and a different cultural tradition, and our goals may be different. It follows that you will prefer to read and to teach literary texts which are not necessarily the same as the ones that I would select. It may be interesting from a comparative point of view, however, to learn what your preferred text corpus is, and which criteria you have employed for selecting it. As long as we are speaking of our personal preferences, there is, in principle, complete freedom in selecting the texts we wish to read.

Things are different, however, when we come to talk of literary canons. A canon of literature is a selection of well-known texts, which we consider valuable and therefore use in teaching and refer to in literary criticism (cf. Fokkema 1986 : 246). Canons used in teaching will be the product of a compromise between people who have decided to adopt certain educational goals – goals that may vary as they are linked to different ideological, political, philosophical and religious world-views.

Usually, one does not design a canon from scratch. Usually there are canons around and the problem rather is, how to adjust the existing canons to the challenge of new developments.

It appears that adjustment of a canon is bound to occur if there is a considerable difference between the knowledge transmitted by the canon and the knowledge needed and available in non-canonized texts. A discrepancy between a canon which cannot serve social and personal needs, on the one hand, and a set of non-canonized texts which answer those needs, on the other, will in the long run inevitably lead to a change or adjustment of the canon, to the effect that the texts that are providing an answer will be included in the new canon. In this perspective, it is a function of the canon to offer models for problem solving. A change in historical consciousness, such as occurred in Europe in the eighteenth century, led to new problems and thus to a new canon. A change in social consciousness, such as manifested in the present awareness of living in a multiracial society as well as in a period of feminist emancipation, will undoubtedly lead – and to a certain extent has already led – to an adjustment and expansion of the canon (cf. Riesz 1985 ; Gilbert and Gubar 1985).

Continued secularization, the introduction of universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy, increasing awareness of the equality of all human beings without regard to race or sex have created the need for a reshuffling of existing canons. At the same time our knowledge of the world, even of the universe, has grown enormously. It would be no surprise if our attitude towards canons and canon formation would become more flexible and tolerant, leading towards a situation in which almost every teacher would feel free to design his or her own canon. This would make our canons not less, but more interesting.

One of the future tasks of the comparatist may be the comparative examination of various canons of world literature as they are current in different cultural zones. But in such a cross-cultural study we have left the problem of evaluation behind us and turned again towards an examina-

tion of the literary system in different parts of the world, which anyway is something we should begin with, since it will provide us with knowledge about the potentialities and effects of literature. Let us hope that on the basis of that sort of knowledge we will become good critics, reliable *sahridayas*.

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CULTURAL RELATIVISM : THE IMPLICATION OF AN IDEOLOGY

S. V. Pradhan

Can one profess to be a cultural relativist and at the same time, without any inconsistency, raise questions of value ? It would have been consistent with the relativistic spirit of the seminar if its theme were "Cultural Relativism and Literary Values" rather than 'literary value'. This is no scholastic—I would rather say positivist—quibble. What a philosopher in the Althusserian tradition employing the Jungian rather than the Freudian technique of analysis would read between the words of this title is that this is a signal from the collective unconscious of a naive universalist monism. And if one is unsympathetic to relativism, one might describe this signal as "a hang-over from monism". It could also be regarded, to vary the metaphor, as a symptom of 'withdrawal' from monism. Which metaphor is more appropriate is a question that had better be left to the imagination of a cultural pathologist, whose decision, if he be a relativist, will depend, I suspect, on whether he is fond of drinks or drugs.

You will see that I am responding to the aim of the seminar as it has been described in the statement of its objectives. I was somewhat taken aback by the assumption that cultural relativism is *the* answer to the cultural or critical problems of a nation that has been fashioned out of several dozen nationalities, none of which is a monolithic entity and all of which are alleged to be bound together by what is claimed to be a common cultural heritage. What looked like a piquant philosophical inconsistency seemed trivial in comparison with the effortless triumph of relativism, and I found myself thinking more of its implications than of its philosophical ancestry. Therefore the harmless academic paper I had planned to write didn't get written and, instead, I found myself saying "wait a minute" to the converts of cultural relativism. (And judging by the recent television

programme on Calcutta's "folk artists", the city would seem to be full of them.) The new title of the paper, therefore, is "Cultural Relativism : The Implications of an Ideology".

I shall begin with a discussion of cultural relativism as it was understood and practised by White, go on to distinguish between cultural relativism as a method and cultural relativism as a philosophy, and then examine the programme of this philosophy. The examination will lead to conclusions which, I hope, will be self-evident. I shall also point out how literary criticism has reacted to relativism (and one may note here that the main stream of literary criticism is unaffected by it) and conclude by risking a few observations on the relevance or otherwise of this doctrine to India.

According to Leslie White, "the most satisfactory definition [of culture] that we have ever had until recently" is Tylor's.¹ The term suggests to him "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (187). The definition might be considered to be exhaustive if the expression "capabilities and habits" included language, tools, patterns of behaviour, socio-economic organization, attitudes and values. Durkheim, Kroeber and others came to feel that culture thus understood cannot be interpreted adequately either sociologically as social process or psychologically as a product of instincts and repression. Durkheim was the first sociologist to point out that we must seek explanations of culture in the nature of culture itself (79). Kroeber and White elaborated this view further and came to look upon culture as a distinct, separate and autonomous class of supra-psychological, supra-social and super-organic phenomena and a *sui generis* process with laws of its own (85). Thus such standard anthropological topics and kinship, terminology, slavery, incest and genius were explained by this school not in terms of drives and taboos but with reference to the total cultural pattern.

This approach, which has been described as cultural determinism, is more frequently referred to as "cultural relativism". There is some justification for this in the writings of White. He believes that the "individual human mind can be made intelligible only by a consideration of the culture of which it is but a reflex" (184) and goes on to propound a plurality of minds and cultures. He says, for instance : "The Hottentot mind, or minding, is not the same as Eskimo, or English, minding. The 'human mind' — human minding — is obviously a variable. And its variations are

functions of variations of the cultural factor rather than of the psychological factor, which may be regarded as constant" (148). And each culture rests upon "a certain basis" and is organized along certain "principles" — the basis and the principles referring clearly to "social production", which can take varied forms ranging from food-gathering, seal hunting to reindeer breeding, agriculture and manufacturing (215). And in support of this determinism and relativism based ultimately on economic principles, he points out various cultural eccentricities. The Chinese, for example, don't like milk and cheese. On the other hand, the Europeans love cheese, and the more it smells the more they relish it. Porterhouse steak has no charms for the Hindu and sirloin steak means nothing to a Chinaman. Bacon leaves the Jew unmoved and pork could cause another Sepoy mutiny. Most people don't approve a diet of worms but some people consider it to be the height of culinary sophistication. In the face of such evidence, it is taken for granted that cultural relativism is as self-evident as the cultural determinism from which it is supposed to follow. Since this theory underlies literary or aesthetic relativism, it is necessary to take a closer look at it in order to see what is involved in extrapolating from an anthropological theory.

Strange as it may seem, this theory of cultural relativism and determinism has been considered by some anthropologists to be close to Marxism. In fact, David Bidney goes so far as to suggest that historical materialism is cultural relativism.² One wouldn't have taken this piece of self-evident nonsense seriously if White's formulation did not invite such a construction by those who have learnt their Marxism from hearsay. However, let us look at the evidence. At one place White makes it clear that by culture he means "the socio-political-economic system" (404). Though the expression he uses is "socio-cultural system" in nine cases out of ten, he does refer to the economic "sub-system" occasionally. At another place, as we have seen, he states unashamedly that the basis of culture is "social production". Finally, he believes that the determinist view of human reality as a system of socio-cultural relations of which the individual is but a reflex, is a restatement of Marx's Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, namely, that "the essence of man is an ensemble of social relations". Apparently, this was enough to make White look red in the U.S.A., and he was promptly felicitated in the U.S.S.R. Though it is a natural weakness to look for allies, it is a bit of a let-down to mistake a rope for a serpent.

In fact, White's determinism smacks of metaphysical materialism. The human mind is only a "reflex" of various systems and sub-systems for him, and he makes no allowance for dialectical interaction between man and nature. Secondly, the economic system for him is only one of the elements. While it underlies the total system, White does not analyse the nature of the relations between it and other systems and sub-systems. Besides, his understanding of the economic system is thoroughly amateurish and unanalytic, innocent as it is of "productive forces", "relations of production", and the labour theory of surplus value. He reads his own meaning into the expression "social relations" in as much as he has no use for class struggle and class consciousness. Marx's analysis of social relations of production, on the other hand, leads to the discovery of objective laws and the logic of history. What Marx offers is not a determinism but a dialectical view of history which recognizes both freedom and necessity. White's explanation of culture in terms of socio-cultural-political and economic systems might be an elaborate sociology of culture, but it does not rise above the occasionally lucid and intelligent sociologism characteristic of those who want Marx without Marxism, i.e. the "19th century ballast" of "class struggle", "class consciousness", "dialectics" and the Communist Party. The behaviour of a cell, biologists tell us, is determined by its position within the system and not by the properties inherent in the cell. White's system does not allow the properties in his "Marxist" elements, such as they are, to manifest themselves; rather they play the role his system demands of them.

Cultural determinism, as it has been presented by White, might perhaps be defined as a method of research in the social sciences, including philosophy, aesthetics and criticism. By the time it percolates to the level of text books, it loses a good deal of its complexity. To give an example: "The principle of relativism, briefly stated, is as follows: Judgements are based on experience, and experience is judged by each individual in terms of his own enculturation."³ If one remembers that the term 'enculturation' refers to the individual's frame of reference which is supplied by one's culture and which provides the premises of one's thought and behaviour, it is clear that all judgements are culture-bound. Thus what was hard-core pornography for the bourgeoisified British nobility was painfully decorous for the maharajahs of native states. Cultural relativism, which points out how systems interact to produce the complex phenomenon of culture has come to mean that God's plenty in respect of humanity also

signifies God's plenty in respect of judgements, attitudes, views, acts, beliefs, customs and practices. And plenty, apparently, is a solid argument against any kind of unity.

What has happened is that cultural relativism as a scholarly method has degenerated into the 'philosophy' of cultural relativism. Perhaps the method snow-balled into a philosophy by picking up a number of adventitious elements from the circumambient cold-war ethos. The emphasis now is exultantly on the diversity and plurality of cultures to the total exclusion of their unifying tendencies provided by the economic system. If the method preaches tolerance, the philosophy is an apologetics for cultural apartheid. Consider the following statement of Herskovits'. He says : "For cultural relativism is a philosophy that recognizes the values set up by every society to guide its own life and that understands their worth to those who live by them, though they may differ from one's own."⁴ What Herskovits means is this : Every society has its own values. Black values are black (i.e. good) enough for the blacks. White values are white (i.e. good) enough for the Whites. Good fences make good neighbours. The message is clear. Botha can't ask for more. Or consider the following remark :

The very core of cultural relativism is the social discipline that comes of respect for differences – of mutual respect. Emphasis on the worth of many ways of life, *not one*, is an affirmation of the values in each culture. Such emphasis seeks to understand and to harmonize goals, not to judge and destroy those that do not dovetail with our own. Cultural history teaches that, important as it is to discern and study the parallels in human civilizations, *it is no less important to discern and study the different ways man has devised to fulfill his needs* – (365-6 ; *Italics my own*).

Lest parallelisms should suggest the essential unity of mankind and lead to inconvenient conclusions, Herskovits insists that differences are equally real. Mankind must in "appetency" continue to travel on the separate and "metalled ways of time past" and not bother about "time future". The rhetoric of the Family of Man of the fifties is undercut by the counter-rhetoric of the Families of Men of the same period. Contradiction Number 1.

At this point one must say : close thy relativism and open thy Marx. How the bourgeoisie draws all, even the most barbarian nations into "civilization", how it tears down the "Chinese Walls" of exclusiveness, how it creates a world after its own image, how national seclusion and self-sufficiency are battered down, how there comes into existence a "universal inter-

dependence of nations", and what role "the need of a constantly expanding market" plays in all this receives its classic statement in the writings of Marx.⁴ "And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property."⁵ Therefore one is compelled to face, with "sober senses", one's "relations with one's kind", kind meaning not one's tribe but the whole of mankind. But this is exactly what the bourgeoisie seeks to avoid. It wishes to write off its revolutionary achievements precisely because they are too revolutionary for its present needs here and now. Cultural relativism is part of its attempt to recreate the world after its new image.

But cultural relativism cannot deny the most obvious similarities. The phenomenon of values, for instance, is common to all cultures. Relativism does not reject this phenomenon, it simply explains it away. While it grants that universal human needs and the imperatives of a universal human nature create universal categories of values, it insists that the context of these universal values, their scope and their importance are of *unlimited diversity*. It thus commits itself to two propositions. (1) Human nature is everywhere the same, and (2) Human nature is nowhere in chains, being expressed differently everywhere. While this is true of pre-capitalist socio-economic formations, is it not a dying tendency in the bourgeois world that Marx has described? Of course, the relativists don't think so, and thus commit themselves to contradiction Number 2. It need hardly be added that the 'intellectual' contradiction has an ideological basis.

The scepticism of a relativist, then, is of a peculiar kind. It does not concern the existence of values as such but extends only to their content. Thus, for instance, homicide is universally condemned. But when an Eskimo aids or abets his ageing parents to expose themselves to the cold, it is not homicide. What this reveals to the relativist is that the context of values differs from culture to culture, and therefore there are or there can be no objective criteria for judging values. Even though values may look similar, their varying content and their different contexts and frames of reference are supposed to rule out the possibility of universal criteria for comparative value judgements. In short, it is argued that if values are universal but incomparable, criteria are both particular and, therefore, incomparable. To return to murder, the prevention of which is a universal value in so far as it is "a conception of the desirable" and a "modality of selective orientation",—the criteria for judging this universal value are local and therefore incomparable. Similarly, the prohibition of incest is

a universal value, perhaps the only absolute value man knows, but the criteria of incest are local and incomparable.

This view is certainly convincing if one grants the premises of the argument. The most important premise is that one sees society as a frieze, in a state of stasis, at a particular moment and not as a process with a past and a likely future. (That, in effect, is the definition of the metaphysical approach to reality.) Secondly, it assumes that in addition to time and space, one's culture also is a form of sensibility in terms of which perception is articulated, making man's mental life a highly local affair, though not without intimations of universality.

The anthropological particularism of the cultural relativist is somewhat exaggerated and probably a product of the anthropologist's infatuation with South Sea islanders, Amazon Indians, New Guinea islanders and such other contemporary savages and barbarians. What it chooses to ignore is that several cultures got cut off from what we now recognize as the mainstream for whatever reasons, and developed local features in their snow-clad, sea-girt or forest-fed isolation. However, as we have seen, this is no longer true of the modern bourgeois epoch, the most remarkable contribution of which to civilization has been the slowly evolving but now fast approaching "global village". And whatever the purists, primitivists and particularists may think of it, Eskimos today in both Russia and North America move about in snowmobiles, and their "senior citizens" have the choice either of languishing in old folks' homes or of fading out into the inhospitable snowy wastes. Equally 'disturbing' trends have been reported from New Guinea, and one can witness this process of levelling down nearer at home in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra where, from what one hears, tribals make excellent revolutionaries. However, cultural relativism does not recognize these tendencies implicit in modern civilization and chooses to focus on a phase which is being fast gathered into history. One can't but be suspicious of 'scientists' who show a predilection for certain kinds of evidence to the total neglect of those which suggest a different line of development prejudicial to their main thesis. Contradiction Number 3.

There is a philosophical dimension to this problem—which throws us back at least one thousand years in time and leads to the scholastic controversy regarding the nature of universals (i.e. general, *a priori* concepts) between the realists, nominalists and conceptualists. When the cultural relativist says there are no absolutes, he is denying the realist

view which maintains that universals exist prior to things. Well, if absolutes have been watered down to universals, in what relation do they stand to objects or reality ? This is the question that both nominalists and conceptualists tried to answer. According to the nominalists, universals don't exist apart from things and yet they don't reflect the properties of things. In short, for them there are no necessary connexions between universals and reality or things. Now, this is precisely the cultural relativist position : There are universals but they are embodied differently in different cultures. Therefore there is no essential connexion between the universals and cultures, and cultural relativism seeks to discover only contingent relations between the two.

What this nominalist view ignores is that there is a necessary connexion between universals and objects. In fact, the nature of universals becomes clearer as one investigates the object in relation to other objects. In other words, though the expression of universals may be varied, the variability of this expression is not a cause for philosophical despair. On the contrary, it suggests the possibility of a movement in the direction of universality as a consequence of the loss of local peculiarities due to the process of unification set in motion by the internationalization of markets. This is precisely what cultural relativism denies, and the denial follows logically from its refusal to admit a necessary connexion between the universals and objects. The pluralism of cultural relativism, then, has its basis in nominalism and epistemological scepticism.

It is clear from the discussion so far that two opposite conceptions of culture are involved here. On the one hand, the idealistic view conceives culture one-sidedly as something static and concerned with the past, as a sum total of results achieved, as an achievement of creative minds and imaginations of gifted individuals. On the other hand, the materialist view of culture sees it as arising in the process of transforming the physical environment into a means of life and considers it to be a material as well as spiritual or mental formation integrating production, the economy, philosophy, politics, science, morals and the arts.⁶ The idealist view absolutizes culture as an autonomous realm and removes it from the process of becoming, which results in the reification of culture. The process here follows the same pattern as Marx observed in the alienation of the worker from the product. Just as man's own product faces him as an independent force over which he has no control, just as the force begins to look mysterious and is (to coin a verb) metaphysicalized as

good or fate, culture **also undergoes** the same transformation in the idealist view and comes to be looked upon as an autonomous entity with laws of its own, as a collection of customs, institutions, beliefs and 'achievements'. Cultural relativism itself can be seen as a reflex of the process of alienation resulting in the reification of culture.

One may also point out that this philosophy receives a 'scientific' support from the contemporary philosophy of science. According to the notion of the "General Hierarchy of Systems" (Boulding and Bertalanffy) there are nine systems in an ascending order of complexity. The last six systems are the biological cell, the living plant, the animal, man, human organization and transcendental systems. A science studying a system of less complexity cannot study a system standing higher in the hierarchy. Man is incapable of comprehending a social system because it is **more complex than man**. According to Geert Hofstede, who bases himself on this scientific hypothesis, man "can never completely grasp what goes on at the level of social systems".⁷ Man can't, therefore, hope to understand culture. Cultural relativism, then, as a *philosophy* is defeatist and self-defeating. Sounds like a modern 'scientific' version this of the familiar priestly obscurantism according to which 'inscrutable' are the ways of God.

What do we do when the scientific-philosophical enlightenment dawns on us that we are 'systemically' incapable of understanding our own products -- i.e. social, political, economic and cultural systems? Hofstede's is the counsel of cultural relativism. He says: "There is no such thing as objectivity in the study of social reality: We will always be subjective, but we may at least try to be 'intersubjective', pooling and integrating a variety of subjective points of view of different observers."⁸ The purpose of this exercise, presumably, is to get to know, not the subject, of course, but each other. Contradiction Number 4. If we can't understand each other, we can at least suffer each other. The confidence, the faith and the philosophy of "what a wonderful piece of work is man" is crowned with the cynical relativism of post-industrial society, the most important value of which is not "comprehension" but mutual toleration, not mutual understanding but exchange of academic gossip. The fall-out of information-explosion, it would seem, is scholarly permissiveness.

Though relativism did not make much of an impact on the mainstream of criticism, it did not go entirely unopposed, at least in the field of American literary criticism. Rejecting the particularist interpretation of culture, Vivas points out that the process towards universality takes

place "along two fronts". "Scientific activity gives us the real world" and secondly, "universality is also achieved by a critical examination of the non-scientific symbolic structures employed in cultures."⁹ More specifically, he writes: "Essentially what intelligence does by its critical work is to rid culture of its inveterate centripetal tendency, its inherent drift toward parochialism" (124). Certain objective structures and subjective faculties, according to Vivas, prevent the shadows of local particularism from closing in on culture.

Rejecting another sacred tenet of the cultural relativist, Vivas maintains that objective, universal judgements on the basis of universal criteria are possible in criticism. He elaborates this thesis in what is now a familiar argument in aesthetics. He starts with a definition of art according to which "art involves material that possesses an inherent capacity for organization, shaped intimately by the artist in order to capture a determinate set of aesthetic values."¹⁰ Given this definition, it follows that an object of art possesses a discriminable structure on which the value of the object depends. Such a value is an "anchored value"—anchored to the structure of the object. "If the value is not anchored in this fashion, there is no question of art, and the object is of no interest to criticism" (297). Thus if a cultural relativist prizes a body decoration (no pun intended) on the basis of its value to a particular culture, Vivas would reject it if this value does not anchor itself to a discriminable structure in the object, which for him is a universal criterion. This theory, he believes, is a matter of "common experience", "although often denied by philosophers" (297). The discriminable structure, the value and the examination through which the two are related to each other can all be examined and verified by "adequately endowed judges" (302).

Vivas's belief that value and criteria are both objective and universal might be regarded as old-fashioned absolutism. What needs to be noticed, however, is that the essence of objectivity lies for him not in consensus but in public verifiability. Objectivity as Vivas understands it may not guarantee universal agreement, but it claims to state those objective grounds which may elicit it from all adequately endowed judges now and in the future.

I have dwelt at length on the anthropological background of cultural relativism, its philosophical theory and ideological implications because I believe that its apparent Marxism and surface liberalism camouflage its irrationality. Vivas's opposition to it on aesthetic grounds shows little

awareness of its cold war rhetoric and the real content of its idealization of static, backward societies whom it wants to nurse their tribal, feudal and peripheral capitalist peculiarities in the name of continuity, heritage and ancestral piety. The doctrine, as a scientific method, is a suggestive hypothesis and might be particularly useful in a discussion of such scholarly myths as the following : Hindus have no sense of history ; Hindus have no sense of tragedy ; India did not experience feudalism ; India doesn't have a bourgeoisie. The list is almost endless, the most remarkable contributors to this mythology being Anglo-Indian historians, British Orientalists and those Indians who went to school to them.

Cultural relativism as a method might also be useful in a discussion of specific problems raised by minorities that produce sub-literatures in languages dominated by established traditions, the specific groups I have in mind being the Dalits, the American Negroes, liberated women and Indian writers in English. However, it also occurs to me that Dylan Thomas, Hugh MacDiarmid, Yeats and Joyce, who might have benefited by the kind of attention cultural relativism as a method provides, did not plead for Welsh, Scottish and Irish aesthetics respectively for their works. Perhaps the message implied in this is less difficult to decode than their "sullen art or craft".

NOTES

- 1 Leslie A. White, *The Science of Culture : A Study of Man and Civilization* (London : Evergreen Books, 1949), p. 87. Tylor's definition of culture from *Primitive Culture* is quoted by White on p. 87. Further references to this edition will be made in parenthesis.
- 2 "Cultural Relativism", *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (London : Macmillan, 1969), III, 545. Further references to this article will be made in parenthesis.
- 3 M. J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology* (1955, rpt. Delhi : Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1969), p. 35.
- 4 Herskovits, p. 364.
- 5 "The Communist Manifesto", *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1969), I, 111-13.
- 6 V. Mshvenieradze, *Political Reality and Political Consciousness* (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1985), pp. 305-45.
- 7 Quoted by Mshvenieradze, *Political Reality*, p. 315.
- 8 Quoted by Mshvenieradze, *Political Reality*, p. 315.
- 9 *Creation and Discovery : Essays in Criticism and Aesthetics* (Chicago : Gateway Editions, N. D.), pp. 123, 124. Further references to this edition will be made in parenthesis.
- 10 *Creation and Discovery*, p. 296.

BRILLIANCE SANS SIGNIFICANCE : THE FICTION OF NIRMAL VERMA

Jaidev

Even while remaining a central fact of most artistic creations, cultural relativism in many an Indian writer has altogether different implications than it has in those whose own culture interacts with another on equal terms. In the case of Indian writers, the interaction involves a power situation heavily biased in favour of the western models. The situation manifests itself in the writer's perception, vision and ideology which can turn quite alien vis-à-vis India. While many of those Indians who write in English offer good examples of such alienation, the situation can obtain equally damagingly with non-Indo-Anglian writers as well. As such, in such unequal intercultural relationships, the issue of literary value has to be linked up with the writer's alienated and bastardized perception itself which is intimately connected with his or her ideology. While it is perverse to insist on cultural insulation, while indeed it is clear that any self-enclosure or self-engrossment is unhealthy for a culture, it is nevertheless true that not all kinds of cultural openness are healthy. The fiction of Nirmal Verma is an instructive case of cultural openness turned unhealthy, self-degrading, wrong.

Nirmal Verma writes attractive, crystalline fiction. In its commitment to form, in its self-awareness, its vivid, poetic imagery, its sensitive psychological texture, it is as impressive as the fiction of European modernists. His stay in Europe, especially Czechoslovakia where he translated a number of Czech works into Hindi, has been fruitful for the artist in him in the sense that as a result he has had an additional culture and literary tradition to utilize. Proust, Hemingway, Virginia Woolf and several others have gone into the making of the artist, and something of India is, of course,

present in the artist as well as the man. As such, his cultural situation appears to be a case of cultural relativism. However, there is a problematic (and disturbing) side to this relativism, and this problematic side forms the subject of this expository essay.

To begin with, I would like to refer to a recent book of essays and reflections by Verma. In the 1985 collection entitled *Dhalan se Urtare Hue* he has an essay on the autumnal years of this century. In it he notes the irony implicit in his feeling responsible for, and committed to, an alien culture which has been distorting and degrading badly his own native culture for over two hundred years¹; in the other essays, he strikes a stance that is rigid in its orthodoxy and nationalism, Gandhian, anti-western, anti-left, anti-industrial; he denounces the continuing mad industrialization which involves so much misery to the poor and neglected in the countryside, besides disfiguring the landscape and playing havoc with the ecology. Indeed, he sounds nostalgic towards the feudalistic set-up because, he argues, its exploitative character notwithstanding, it was value-based, paternalistic, rooted in the culture of our people. He champions Hindu culture for its wholeness and catholicity, values Gandhi, and even while he thinks that Premchand's realism wouldn't do now, he approves of his overall approach to India's realities, especially in his last works, *Godan* and "Kafan".

The above, somewhat simplified, assortment of Verma's social, intellectual and literary views is offered to highlight the breathtaking contrast that his fiction provides. It is breathtaking because in few other self-conscious writers does such a chasm appear between the intellectual, socially-concerned individual and his practice as a fictionist. Again, at the risk of simplifying, I would like to offer an overview of Verma's fiction. A substantial body of it is situated in foreign lands, England, Czechoslovakia, and so on. More specifically, a European hotel or train, a single man's digs, an inter-racial family, bars (and in his first novel, *Ve Din*, it seems to be his ambition to out-Hemingway Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* alcohol-wise!), foreign parks, libraries, a lonely island, etc. are places he prefers for unfolding the drama of his fiction. This is no doubt natural in the context of its alien setting. But even so, Verma does not deal with social situations. Most of his group situations are closed situations. Loneliness is not just an existential theme in him; his whole imagination seems to be cloistral and shirks social, open situations.

This fascination for closed situations grows oppressive, factitious in

Verma's 'Indian' fiction because it makes it resemble a message without an address. It is as though the stories could just as well have been placed in Europe with only slight modifications. They, in this sense, travel light. An air-conditioned library in New Delhi, a secluded *barsati* on top of an upper-class kothi, a private room, coffee bars with the centre on a particular table, a theatre during rehearsals—it is a very exclusive and for the same reason a lonely, world in which allusions to Camus and Kierkegaard, Chekhov and Strindberg, Haydn and Bach, western jazz and Mother Mary's statue constitute the centres towards which the Indian experience gets centripetally directed. In a story placed in London, a failed husband visits his daughter and separated wife. The daughter refers to the Indian poor: "But the poor in India? One night I watched them on TV."² Nirmal Verma's characters, even while they live in India, are supposed to be surrounded by these poor, but the feeling one gets of these poor is precisely that of unreal, shadowy ones, as if they are fit only for an occasional appearance on TV. In his novel *Ek Chhithda Sukh* which is placed in Delhi, there occurs a scene in which the rather unsubstantial, contextless heroine sits with the narrator in a wayside eating place in Connaught Circus; the two watch some poor children who swoop on any leftovers and hide them under their shirts. The painful effect the scene creates is nevertheless schizophrenic, nightmarish—terrifying the central characters all right but not moving them or touching them in any social, significant sense. Nor does it leave any perceptible effect on the total structure of the novel. It is almost a kind of masochism practised by the novelist as an expiation for not bothering with the far more representative aspects of the Indian experience. The scene reveals a perception that is an outsider's, a spectator's, acute in catching details but refusing all the same to relate to them or their meaning, staying detached, uninvolved, a perception that is a luxury of sorts. Susie Tharu's complaint about the narration in *Untouchable* where, according to her, the perceptual distance is not objective but mechanical,³ is even more applicable to Verma's perception of India's poverty. The problem is not with the ability to observe, but with the attitude itself, with the ability or wish to relate or understand. It is far easier for him to capture Indian seasons or surroundings than Indian people. He could love India if it were not for the people in there ...

But perhaps a qualification is due here. It is of course not that Verma's 'two inches of ivory' strike one as an invented India; rather, they

suggest a very classy, elitist, exclusive India which is there in Delhi or any metropolis and yet whose un-Indianness is so characteristic that it could just as well be anywhere, in any part of the western world. From the exclusive pockets which are his India, the poor Indians are either a horror or just a depressing strip of a TV documentary on India ; they appear exactly as they do in, say, *Heat and Dust*. And while one understands it in the case of Jhabwala, one regrets and resents it in Verma.

A quick way of observing the problem with his perception would be to focus on his first novel, *Ve Din* (1964). In the first-person narrative, there is hardly anything which could be construed as legitimately Indian about the narrator-hero. The foreign contexts of the foreign characters get suggested but except for a letter the hero receives from India (and this too significantly remains unread all through the narrative) there is nothing to give credence to his Indian connection. This kind of erasure has an effect on the solidity or reality of the character, but it also denotes a wilful lack of interest in anything Indian.

Or consider the thematic preoccupations of Verma : fashionable adulteries with no suggestion of an Indian neighbourhood which is normally quite watchful and curious, adulteries being as smooth in Delhi as in Prague — indeed, neighbourhood is something carefully excluded in Verma ; intense heartbreaks and private tragedies but again untainted by a social context ; Freudian fixations ; Heideggerian concerns with not-being and death, Proustian ones with memory ; young people losing their innocence ; bear orgies ; and suicides mostly managed in a social vacuum ; no politics, no history, no really-felt social or economic dimension. To be fair to him, there is much poignant, psychological poetry in him, but this agonized writer's agonized creatures live through experiences which, though available in India as well as anywhere else, seek legitimization in a highly rarefied ethos. This, I think, is the greatest limitation of Verma, this desire to endow intense poetry with a compensatory quality to make up for 'the rougher and coarser movements going on around him.' Some exceptions are there, no doubt, but even a story like "Maya Darpan" Or "Diary ka Khel" approaches external experiences through lonely, highly privatized consciousnesses. It is very like Virginia Woolf — this compulsive tendency to first make a private self sponge the limited external context and only then to let a few bits and pieces impressionistically trickle out for the purpose of suggesting the world out there. Verma is successful in managing impressionistic techniques, but, unlike in Woolf, the lonely, alienated,

introverted perception this suggests is not the best thing for Indian fiction. In fact, in the context of Indian society and life-rhythms, this perception is an embarrassment and liability. It does not suggest cultural relativism so much as it suggests a basic failure to align one's technique with the nature of experience. Whether his chosen technique follows his lack of interest in Indian realities or vice versa is an open question, but each looks to be a concomitant of the other.

Both his perception and his technique ultimately indicate a vision, an ideology or philosophy whose roots and affiliations are elsewhere, in existentialism and modernism, whose Indian connections are incidental, gratuitous. It is possible that a European reader of Premchand or Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay experience difficulties in relating to the experience they depict, and this is understandable. It is similarly possible for an Indian reader to feel uneasy or unhappy with a Kipling's, Forster's or Jhabwala's mediation of Indian realities ; and this too can be appreciated. But that many an Indian reader should find it difficult to relate to the India of Verma is sad. A teacher of European literature having dabbled a little in Woolf, Proust and others, may relate to it, but the effect is nevertheless of a cultural sell-out, of unconditional surrender. It is as though the massively Indian in India just didn't matter, didn't engage Verma's attention or sympathy. The themes are not the issue. Adultery, for example, can be a wholly credible Indian theme. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* deals with it in a valid Indian context and as a result appears to be even a better book than *The Scarlet Letter* whose influence is central here. In Nirmal Verma, the effects seldom transcend pastiche.

To situate Indian characters in a socio-political vacuum and thus implicitly suggest that this vacuum is all right indicates an alienation whose humanity itself smacks of bad faith. It is true that a writer writes the way he can ; it is also true that fiction cannot be a made-to-order product. But as literary critics, we can ask if an Indian writer's getting his inspiration, imagination and perception daubed so heavily with alien fetishes like existentialism, modernism, the absurd, etc. improves his art or impairs it, impairs it by alienation. Perhaps the truth is that alien techniques or philosophies can be of use to him only if he has, in the first place, a solid Indian, involvedly Indian core to serve as a kind of moorings for them. In Verma's case, this core is conspicuous by its absence. His nearest kin in Indian literature is not in Hindi literature but in Indian fiction in English, namely Anita Desai ; and while in Desai one

can perceive a desperate struggle to end alienation, Verma seems quite content writing a fiction for which India provides facts and details all right, but in which ultimately these facts and details get mediated by a sensibility which has little Indian in it.

Nirmal Verma has talked of corruption pervading Indian society and pleaded for keeping art pure, uncontaminated. This pure art, according to him, must have high, rigorous standards and make no compromises. It sounds fine, but it also reminds one of the New Critics who were actually called the Purists. Now unfortunately, no aesthetic question is ultimately isolable from ideology or politics, for no art is innocent or neutral; in art, as in life, ignorance and purity can both be forms of complicity. The so-called pure art can mean—and has meant—that it stays away from the crucial, significant historical and social issues; it can mean, in other words, that an apolitical, ahistorical outlook should be projected as a superior outlook. In this way, pure art comes to have a reactionary, deflective and diversionary value at certain times, in certain societies. Consciously or otherwise, this pure art turns out to be a heartless, soulless object, useful, even when it flaunts its Kantian uselessness, to the vested interests which in turn promote and patronize it. Literary criticism is not innocent, either. It too can turn pure and foreground its concern with pure aesthetic traits and in so doing transform the descriptive terms into value-loaded ones. Tension, rhythm, imagery, irony, ambiguity, symbols paradox, self-reflexivity are all there in plenty in Verma. But a literary criticism which seeks to use these formal virtues to justify the absences in him is not so pure as suggestive of cultural surrender. Some societies can perhaps afford the luxury of formalism, but in a society like ours both pure art and formalism appear a little obscene. History may be a nightmare and time a misfortune, people may be unbeautiful and their concerns too mundane and banal—but so much of what constitutes WE comes from and gets realized in time and history, in our association with people. Verma's negation and avoidance of history partakes of a very elitistic and 'superior' ideology but it is a depressing, sad ideology. His stylistic brilliance and technical virtuosity could well have ensured a cultural relativism of healthy proportions if he had tried for a significant character, a genuine indigenous signature for his fiction. Alas, so much of brilliance is spent for pastiche effects, not on solidity or significance. It is perhaps an index to his cultural state that while reading him one keeps noticing its sources in Proust, Hemingway, Woolf, Beckett, and others, but discovers

no Indian literary connections whatsoever, except perhaps the Ajneya of *Apne Apne Ajnabi*. There is something not quite right with this kind of cultural relativism.

It is not true that Verma himself is not aware of what his writing hand does. I have mentioned how conscious he is of the irony of his feeling responsible for an alien, disfiguring culture. In one of his Indian stories entitled "Kavve aur Kala Pani" the writer-hero reflects painfully : "You write, but whenever an extraordinary truth confronts you, you evade it and run as if the truth of living had no relation with the truth of writing."⁴ A self-reflexive detail, it points to the writer's guilt in allowing a disjunction between living and writing. In the preface to a collection of stories entitled *Beech Bahas Mein*, he admits to his feeling expatriate, an estranged Indian suspect everywhere including in his own eyes.⁵ But the acute awareness has not so far propelled him towards ending this alienation and estrangement. In his last published novel, *Ek Chhithda Sukh* (1979), the characters are all estranged, outsiders ; the heroine's room is filled with foreign pictures, foreign records ; and the manners and behaviour patterns are all borrowed. To another character, an Adela Quested of sorts, India appears not real, but a theatre. All this testifies to the spectatorial stance his fiction brings to India. If India is a theatre, so can be any country. Indeed, the heavy use the novel makes of dramatic motifs itself smacks of pastiche Pirandello or pastiche Fowles.

Why then does Verma strike that extreme India-loving, Hindu culture-advocating, Gandhi-admiring attitude in his non-fictional writings ? Broadly speaking, there need not be a deep contradiction here. Cultural chauvinism and cultural servility often go hand in hand, each in its own way legitimizing and perpetuating the status-quo, in an exploitative and class-based social structure. Verma's chauvinism may arise from his need to rationalize his alienation : the more alienated he feels, the more Indian he needs to project himself in his more deliberate writings.

And yet, to be honest, I tremble while sounding so judgemental. There is much in Verma's fiction to which I respond, but also feel bad while doing so. For, isn't there a lot in my class-determined, profession-determined perception and ideology that is so poignantly, intensely, poetically rendered by Verma in his fiction ? Do I not sinfully respond to my country, her culture and her mute masses exactly the way Verma does ? A cosy, complacent philistine background, an all-but-total ignorance of Indian traditions and culture, an overly alienating education and job, a

bastardized perception, an automatic disgust at several major Indian habits and mores, an individualized, privatized, privacy-demanding psyche exulting in its petty torments—all these and more not only find themselves concretized in Verma but also made so very beautiful and poetic. Verma is not alone in feeling estranged being at home ; it seems the entire thrust of our education, our present socio-political situation is towards wrenching us away from our roots, from our essential Indian connexions. His fiction, if deconstructed, appears to be a product and a mirror of this wider and sickly socio-cultural situation. However, while its fidelity to this situation is not in question, there still remains a difference between making fiction an Arnoldian criticism of life and making it a means of endorsing, if not edifying, that sickly situation.

A guru-like friend once explained to me the importance of Gandhi and Tagore. Each, in his own way, decided to act in order to prevent alienation from setting in ; they both acted and succeeded in identifying with the genuine rhythm and tenor of India. They both treated alienation as insanity. One went out to experience India before launching his political career ; the other directed students and teachers at Santiniketan to continually leave the campus and get soaked in the community festivals. Verma adores Gandhi, talks approvingly of Premchand, and has written a moving essay on Singarauli ; but all such pronouncements, in spite of their sincerity, sound somewhat factitious. In any case, his fiction is not at all touched by Gandhi, Premchand, or the poor, so pure, formal and alienated it is. Right from the start, Verma has been ripe for the healthiest kind of cultural relativism, but unfortunately he has practised only cultural surrender and servility.

NOTES

- 1 "Shatabdi ke Dhalate Varshon Mein", *Dhalan se Utrate Hue* (New Delhi : Rajkamal, 1985), p. 69. The translation here, as elsewhere, is mine.
- 2 "Ek Din ka Mehman", *Kavve aur Kala Pani* (New Delhi : Rajkamal, 1983), p. 167.
- 3 Susie Tharu, "Reading against the Imperial Grain : Intertextuality, Narrative Structure and Liberal Humanism in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*", *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, 24 (1986), p. 65.
- 4 "Kavve aur Kala Pani", *Kavve aur Kala Pani*, p. 140.
- 5 *Beech Bahas Mein* (Hapur : Sambhavana Prakashan, 1973), p. 9.

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I HAVE LOST THE TEXT

B. K. Tripathy

There are different cultures. Okay, we accept that. People have come through different historical experiences creating particular kinds of cognition and responses ; they have different languages with distinct systems of signifiers and relationships among them ; different kinds of arbitrariness in signifier-signified relationship or language-world relationship ; they have different rituals ; they have different aspirational models. Et cetera. We recognize the difference. We recognize the difference by juxtaposition with ours or with others'. And the literary text is a cultural artefact or perhaps a cultural phenomenon. Okay, we agree ; for the time being, that is. Therefore, we can recognize it intertextually, or, in other words, interculturally. But then cultures are multiple variables. Synchronistically there are very many at any point of time to create a relativistic situation. Diachronistically cultures change through time so that the product of one period can be recognized through *difference*.

So what ?

So we have problems. *One* : the literary text becomes a cultural artefact or phenomenon. If the former, it has to be studied in terms of the culture conditions, materials, skills, tools and aesthetics. If the latter, it has to be studied as history, historical anthropology or ethnology. *Two* : but then a culture in isolation is not capable of generating meaning although it creates a value-system of acts, thoughts and words within itself at a particular time or during a period. Such value-systems, operating within a culture, however, cannot be used to judge that culture, except in juxtaposition with other cultures or other value-systems, although an artefact or a phenomenon within the value-system can be judged in terms of the system. Judged within itself, insularly, an artefact or a literary

work can only be judged aesthetically in terms of more or less beautiful ; in terms of the dynamics of emotions or thoughts within it ; in terms of the complexity or skill of arrangement of elements. But then such judgement will tend to be formal and literary rather than cultural, unless, of course, we argue that the sense of beauty and skill are cultural matters anyway, and we shall not so argue. Cultural judgement of a literary work is possible in two ways : one, through content, some of which—people, society, acts, language—will be judged in terms of verisimilitude, cognitively ; and the others like sensation, emotion, thought will be judged in terms of relevance, utility and effect. Apart from this a cultural judgement of a literary work is possible only in terms of the products of other cultures, through juxtaposition, contrastively creating a perspective of differences through which value in terms of better or worse will emerge. Alternatively the idea will emerge that value cannot operate in a relativistic situation, cognition will have to be enough. Now, if values do emerge it will have to be in terms of content-material : kind of life, truthfulness of depiction, logicality of arrangement, sincerity of the artist and the effect it would create.

So ?

So we have problems again. And this piece will deal with some of them, but mainly with the problem of the identity of a text : whether it can have identity as a cultural artefact or phenomenon and whether it can be reached as such as a text with independent identity, cultural rather than literary. And if it can, it will be possible to talk of it in value-terms or to judge it or subject it to a pre-descriptive treatment.

So I begin reading *Hamlet*, not reading really but trying to reach the text up there on the shelves.

But hamlet ? What hamlet ? And what's there in it anyway ? Who would want to think about a churchless small village, least of all live in it ? Unless one is a used-up anthropologist. Hamlet is archaic, out of fashion, dead and gone.

But, sir, I am not talking about that hamlet.

But you are, sir ! When you use a word you are necessarily talking about everything the word is capable of containing in the context of that language and culture. If you don't know this you better learn. I shall tell you what's contained in Hamlet. Everything that culture has generated in the history of the English language ; everything concerning that confluence of sound or letters of the alphabet. I have already said that in

it an archaic life-style is involved. But there are lots more in it. First of all there is ham. Yes, ham. Don't look so surprised. In old English, 'ham' meant home. Ham, in historical sense, means a town or village, like Oakham, Birmingham or Cheltenham. Obviously very old names. Ham, associated with hamlet, creates the image of a small 'burg' as in Hamburg. And then we have the 'ham' in it: the amateur, an inexperienced performer, an inexperienced or ineffective actor, or one who rants and overacts. That's the ham in *Hamlet*. He may even be clumsy and heavy-handed. For all we know this ham may be related to the Ham, the ancient Egyptian people, at the worst hybridized between the Egyptians and the Hebrews, landing us squarely in the field of Egypto-Christian-Jewish history.

But then that is not all about ham. There is the ham we are all fond of: the back of the thigh, the thigh and buttock; even the bend of the knee. We love it. Even the thigh of the hog salted and dried in smoke or otherwise. Or even the whole contemporary urban culture or hamburger lunches with french fries and coca-cola.

But, Sir: if you permit me, that's not the *Hamlet* I am talking about. I am talking about that book up on the shelf, there, a play, tragedy written by Shakespeare, called *Hamlet*, a famous play, about Hamlet, the prince of Denmark.

That matters little, really. Once you speak a word all the culture-content it can carry it will carry, parts of it for each of the people who know only that part but the whole for the learned. And when we see it that way we are seeing human culture, we are seeing history.

But sir, I don't want to see such things. I only want to get my text of *Hamlet* and read it. If you would be so kind as just to step aside I would get to my Shakespeare shelf.

And what do you think I have been talking about? The very same. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The western psyche is seeped in the idea of revenge, even codified in the biblical dictum of tooth for a tooth, eye for an eye. Among the Greek gods the father tries to kill the son and the son tries to retaliate in the very same way. Among their kings, a father kills his daughter and the mother kills the father, and then the son kills the mother. The Latin imitators of the Greeks were no better than them. And the English became the rightful inheritors of the tradition. A son is killed and the father sets out to wreak vengeance. We readily see the knotted strands of tradition. Now reverse the situation. A father is

killed and the son mopes about seeking the right moment to shed the moist blood with his bare bodkin, poison or whatever he could find handy. Uranus, Cronus, Agamemnon, Jeronimo, Hamlet ; Greece, Spain, Denmark ; and the knot-tiers are Aeschylus, Seneca, Kyd, Shakespeare of Greece, Italy, England ; all Europe tied together in a bond of revenge-logic holding the psyche and literature to ransom. And in England what better receivers than the barbarians of Elizabeth, the descendants of Henry the Eighth ? The torture chambers of the Tower of London and its popular modern replica in Madame Tussaud's museum stand testimony.

But sir, you are talking about a certain behaviour pattern of a culture and judging it on the dubious evidence of literature. In any case I just want to get my text.

The evidence is not dubious ; far from it. Literature is a cultural expression. It is part of the process knitting culture together in describing it and in communicating it to individual participants, eliciting responses which go into the making of more literature. It's all a part of the cultural expression and communication network. What relevance does it have other than this ? How can Hamlet's action have any meaning when insulated from history and community ? Without Agamemnon, Orestes, Electra, Iphigenia, Thyestes, Tereus, Philomela, Procne, Jeronimo, Hamlet is severed from history, hermetically sealed and meaningless : a bottled specimen of plutonian rock in earth's museum. Likewise remove him from Denmark and from Elizabethan England, he is further truncated. Take him out from the world of theatre, from the conventions of Elizabethan drama, take him away from the performers Berrymore, Gielgud, Olivier, Burton, you have hacked away everything. Removed from history, isolated from culture and its conventions, the literary text is meaningless and irrelevant. It is meaningful only as a part of a system of language or of theatrical conventions or of behaviour or of communication. Or of a larger confluence combining all these. Each culture-group operates in terms of a system. An artefact or phenomenon is significant and relevant within this system and in relation to it. In itself it is nothing. It does not take any meaning. It cannot.

But sir ! I insist ! I want the text of my *Hamlet*.

You insist nothing. You ignoramus ! What do you think I am doing ! I am giving you the text of the *Hamlet* you want. When I tickle you do you not laugh ? When I prick you do you not bleed ? Why then can't you see when I show you something ? And there is more. The relevance

an artefact or a phenomenon has within a culture or system is of only limited validity, because just as the artefact or phenomenon is meaningless by itself in isolation, the whole culture or system is meaningless by itself in isolation, self-referentially. If *Candide* were the only literary work ever written it would mean nothing. The French Revolution would mean little all by itself and if it were the only revolution in world history it would mean no more. *Candide* takes its meaning from other French works. The French Revolution becomes significant in the context of other revolutions and counter-revolutions in France. But then when *Candide* is referred out beyond the system to be related to the products of other cultures or systems, for example, in relation to Pope, Butler, Shaw, Orwell, it takes on a greater meaning. When the French Revolution is referred out to other revolutions in human history it receives an additional meaning, gaining significance and relevance. In other words, a system, however self-sustaining and self-sufficient it may appear to be, is in itself meaningless unless referred out to other systems.

For example, look at your *Hamlet*. You will notice I have only talked about 'Ham', not yet about 'let', to which I may return later. But for the time being, to your *Hamlet*. When Cronus chopped off father Uranus's prick with a stone scythe while the latter was in bed with the Earth Mother, there is very little of the real issues hidden or swamped with subterfuges or sublimational distortion. When Cronus eats his sons, the Cyclopes, very little is hidden. But when Zeus escapes with the help of the Earth Mother, he comes back for revenge but is far more 'civilized' than his father had been. We see the subterfuges at play. He defeats the father, makes him disgorge the Cyclopes, and seizes the throne and the Mother. When we come to Oedipus things have changed. Such have been the cultural changes into the guilt phase that the wilful killing of the father and appropriation of the woman is not acceptable. The emotions and desire to destroy the father persist, however, leading to the use of subterfuges. The son must try to avoid killing the father but kill him nevertheless in arrogant confrontation. He must try to avoid taking his father's woman for wife but do it nevertheless unwittingly. Moving through the guilt and shame phases the culture has learnt to accommodate its inalienable but unacceptable desires: the never-ending battle between generations, between the father and the son. Thousands of years after the mythic and literary accommodation of the Greeks, in the early twentieth century a Paul Morel battles his father with the help of the mother,

Gertrude, the continuation of the Earth Mother. A few hundred years earlier stands Hamlet with the codes confused somewhat through diverse borrowings. He hates his father surrogate, his uncle Claudius, just as Krishna had hated his, or Theseus had, although the last named would not confess it and would blame the flag that he forgot to hoist. Our Hamlet, however, loves his father or so he would have us believe now that he is dead. But he is in love with his mother for he is so jealous of his mother's husband whom she had rightfully wedded with the sanction of the community. But then he has got to hate women, for he drives Ophelia to death. We readily see the confusion of codes. He should have hated his father and wished him dead but of course he is at pains to show that he does not. Even the Greek gods are capable of taking other women as wives in the third generation. But Hamlet is not. Later Paul Morel is, however painfully, capable of doing it. What then does the confusion of codes in Hamlet mean? It is an Oresteian confusion. Orestes enters Hamlet as much as Oedipus does, perhaps more. The same vacillation, confusion, love-hate for the mother, and hate for the mother's lover. Now this is your *Hamlet* and this *Hamlet* cannot be reached insularly. You have to reach it through a culture context and, what's more, inter-culturally, relativistically.

But sir, were you talking about *Hamlet*, book up there?

Of course. What else? Now I shall tell you about the battle for succession and the laws about it and the efforts to defeat these.

I don't want to hear it. I want my text of *Hamlet*. Will you please step aside.

No. You wanted to know about literary value. I must tell you about it. Literary value is essentially cultural value. It exists in the ability of the text to assemble confluences through time and space, so that we can see history as the temporal element and culture as the spatial element drawn into its vortex. You would say all texts would do this. Well yes they would. You would ask: then how can we distinguish text from text? Separate the good from the bad? The answer is simple. You don't have to. You are only confusing codes in bringing in the good and the bad and in thinking of discrete identities which do not exist. If this is something too much for you to understand, I'll give you something simpler. That text which brings in a greater confluence of history and culture into itself is the better. But I would advise you to forget about the discrete identity of the text and forget about better and worse.

And sir, that's *Hamlet* ?

Yes, that is it.

Now will you stand aside.

No.

So, I balled up my fist, screwed my face, took a deep breath and swung an upper-cut that would, I thought, knock the daylight out of Mohamed Ali. It was as good. He crashed through the window breaking the glass and fell outside in the corridor and ran away. I asked the sweeper to sweep away the glass and the chops of blood. He looked at me curiously and mumbled something like "what glass ? what blood ?" the fool.

I took my *Hamlet* down and sat at my desk waiting for the class. It was time. The boys and girls were audible now down the corridor. They rushed in noisily and settled down. One of them, a timid looking girl said : "Sir, we doing *Hamlet* today, aren't we ?"

"Hamlet ?" I asked. "What *Hamlet* ?"

ON SINO-INDIAN CROSS-CULTURAL HORIZONTAL CONTINUITY

Tan Chung

Those who are interested in cross-cultural studies can find enough food for thought in the case of historical and cultural interactions between India and China. Before we come to them, let us first put our discussion in proper ecological perspective. Long before the arrival of man-apes on earth the land of India, which was separated from that of China by sea, began to move towards the latter. The two lands had the historic *hug*, the impact of which created the Himalayan heights. Even today the two lands are drawing towards each other, making the Himalayas grow a few inches every year. The Himalayas are the children of the land masses of India and China. To show their filial piety, they send down civilization-giving rivers—Indus, Ganga, Huanghe, Yangtze—thus beginning the trans-Himalayan civilization of which India and China stood, many thousand years ago, as the two epi-centres. The radiant cultural waves sent from the two epi-centres formed an oxidization-zone in the front area. The two oxidization arcs met at two nodical points which were known in history as 'Serindia' and 'Indochina', both synonymous, illustrating the vigour of Sino-Indian cultural interactions. The two geographical areas, i.e., Central Asia (nicknamed 'Serindia') and Southeast Asia (nicknamed 'Indochina'), ultimately became stepping-stones for the Indian cultural influence to travel to China and vice versa.

Unfortunately, I have not collected as much evidence of the Chinese cultural influence on India as I have done about the reverse which I shall spell out in a moment. In order to illustrate it better, let me introduce a new element of philanthropic versus acquisitive cross-cultural pattern to the confrontational interculturalness now engaging scholarly attention.

One unique feature of ancient Indian culture was the *dānapati* (philanthropic) mood which dovetailed with the Chinese acquisitive mood of ancient times brilliantly summarized by the great modern writer, Lu Xun (1881-1936), as 'nalaizhuyi' (the principle of taking). The ancient Indian tradition of *sannyāsa* (homelessness) not only led bright intellectuals to renouncing the world and becoming Buddhist monks, but drove these Buddhist missionaries to alien lands leaving little trace of their activity in homeland. Buddhist evangelism typified the ancient Indian *dānapati* cultural mood. The empty begging bowl and the three-piece cotton attire (which projected the half-naked body) of Gautama Buddha and his followers disguised a vigorous altruistic cultural movement which is unthinkable to the modern western existentialist mind. Indian Buddhist monks lived on till they breathed their last in ancient China without any home-sickness. Nothing was treated as national treasure in ancient India, and a large number of rare versions of Buddhist scriptures and paintings were gifted to the Chinese pilgrims who had risked their lives to journey to ancient India to collect them. If we compare Mahāyāna Buddhism as the daughter of ancient India married to ancient China, then the dowry of the marriage was true to traditional generosity to the extent that Indian Buddhist scholars today have to turn to Chinese literature for the details of the doctrine of Mahāyānism.

That Chinese literature has acquired the enviable status of the richest repository of Buddhist teaching is because of China's written tradition as opposed to India's oral tradition, of Chinese culture's fondness for record-keeping matching India's indifference in this respect, and of a historic enterprise patronized by Chinese governments from the end of the fourth century onwards. This enterprise was the trans-national Yijingyuan (*Sūtra* Translation Academy) employing international intellectual inputs to convert Sanskrit and Pali Buddhist scriptures into Chinese literature. There is an estimate that in all more than seven thousand volumes were translated. Chinese scholars contributed annotations and commentaries which add to the preserved translations to produce a massive Chinese Tripiṭaka (as the transformation of the original Indian Tripiṭaka which is not extant) of more than three thousand works and fifteen thousand odd chapters.¹ A world citizen of Indian origin, monk Kumārajīva (who arrived in China in 382 and died there in 413) was the first ever Director of this *Sūtra* Translation Academy. Many other Buddhist scholar-monks of Indian origin, like Bodhiruci (who arrived in China in 693 and died

there in 727) and Amoghavajra (who arrived in China in 719 and died there in 774), also distinguished themselves (along with Kumārajīva) in Chinese literature as great Sanskrit-Chinese translators. Here we have an outstanding example of the philanthropic-acquisitive cross-cultural intercourse in transforming the Indian Tripiṭaka into a Chinese Tripiṭaka.

An even more significant example of horizontal continuity was the transference of the 'golden culture' from Gupta India (third to fifth century) to Tang China (seventh to tenth century) analogous to the migration of frontline development from nineteenth century Europe to twentieth century America with a potential tendency of its shift to Japan. Several feathers on the cap of Tang China were not unrelated to an Indian influence. In the first instance, there was the Tang invention of printing which was an Indian idea exported to China by the missionaries of Buddhism. The genesis of seal printing in India can be traced to the days of Mohenjo-daro civilization. Ancient Indian Buddhists developed what the Chinese visitors called 'foyin' (Buddha-image seal-printing) which quickly found imitations in China. The innovative Tang people went a step further to carve a whole wooden block to print Buddhist texts and other materials ; hence the invention.²

The trans-Himalayan herb — tea — has made modern history. It helped the Industrial Revolution, promoted Westminster-type democracy, and ignited the movement of American Independence. The tea culture has had a three-phased development. It began as ancient China's ace medicine for the stomach, much sought by China's own meat-eaters as well as by the neighbouring tribes who had scanty cereals to balance their excessive diet of animal fat and protein. During the Tang Dynasty, the Buddhist temples in their new Chinese mountain-top habitat developed for their luxury-addicted rich patrons a two-star *ahimsā*-enjoyment of material life, i.e., a non-alcoholic elegant beverage — tea, and a feast of vegetarian dishes made of the 'delicacies of the mountains' (*shanzhen*). In modern times, Britons have made tea a food by drinking it along with milk and sugar.³ Just as the increase of consumption of tea in the nineteenth century was the English East India Company's attempt to kill two birds at one stone, for both the tea interests and sugar interests, the Tang Buddhists' development of the tea-beverage-culture helped to see the birth and growth of a new industry, i.e., porcelain, since hot, fragrant, elegant tea had to be served in light, shining, heat-insulating cups. China's emergence as a world-famous porcelain producer was another feather on the cap of the golden Tang Chinese culture.

The Buddhist *āryamārga* (true path) was also the path which led to the development of Tang golden literature. The transformation of the Indian Tripiṭaka into a Chinese Tripiṭaka inevitably led to the transference of the golden treasures of pre-Gupta literature to China. A stock of 35,000 new vocables had been added to the Chinese dictionary by the *sūtra*-translators. The first beneficiary of this new vocabulary was Tang poetry which is considered the best in Chinese history. Leading Tang poets had all imbibed a measure of Buddhist influence. The famous poet and painter, Wang Wei (698-759 or 701-61), had used the Chinese transliteration of the name of a great Indian *upāsaka*, Vimalakīrti, i.e., 'Weimo-jie' as the two names of himself, thus being known as Wang Wei and Wang Mojie – in other words, Wang Vimalakīrti. This Chinese reincarnation of Vimalakīrti infused Buddhist ideas, such as *śūnyatā* (the void), into both his poems and paintings. Li Bo (701-62), who has often been regarded as the greatest Chinese poet, arrogated to himself the title of 'Qinglian jushi', the Chinese version of the Sanskrit *nilotpala-upāsaka*, meaning 'a lay devotee as pure as the blue lotus'. As if this was not enough to reveal the Buddhist inside him, Li Bo also composed the following poem to make it doubly sure :

Here I am
the Blue Lotus of A Lay Devotee,
an angel from the Heavenly Abode
being abandoned to humanity.
The hideout of my reputation
for thirty exuberant springs
is the bar in the inns.
Why such curiosity
from His Excellency
in the Hu Prefecture bureaucracy ?
You know my life next
is all set for the best
as the Buddha of Golden Millet.⁴

Li Bo's life and poetic career entitled him a close association with the identity of *xian* (angel) which was a Sino-Indian intercultural symbol, indicating a supernatural being. He was 'Zhexian' (the abandoned angel), 'Jiuxian' (the alcoholic angel), 'Shixian' (the poetic angel), and also 'Yuezhongxian' (the angel in the moon). Du Fu (712-70), his good friend who has shared his reputation as China's greatest poet, said that

When ten litres of wine
drowns Li Bo's intestines,
he is sure to immerse
in hundred pieces of verse.⁵

Indeed, almost every masterpiece of Li Bo smells of the Chinese rice whiskey which had become a vogue in Chinese high culture, thus drinking parties turning into instant poetry sessions. But the spiritual power of Li Bo's verses was distilled from both the strong Chinese rice whiskey and the Buddhist metaphysical jewels of ideas. That was how "the Buddha of Golden Millet" and "the Blue Lotus of A Lay Devotee" became relevant to Li Bo's alcoholism. The more he was drunk, the better preacher of Buddhism his poetry became. Considering the universal popularity that Li Bo's poems have enjoyed for the last twelve hundred years, which great master of a Buddhist school or sect can match his contribution to universalizing the ideas of humanism that originated from Gautama Buddha? For Chinese culture the new trend created by Li Bo was the intellectual aloofness to the mundane scrambles for riches and fame which had bedevilled high society like an Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). This disease may be called 'ACIDS' (Acquired Cultural Immunity Deficiency Syndrome). Thus, Li Bo's setting up of the new trend of 'Zhexian' (the abandoned angel)—a title which had a good many takers among the Tang poets after Li Bo—signified the arrival of cultural antibodies to fight the moral decadence of intellectuals thanks partially to the Enlightened One from India. We notice that many great ancient civilizations, like those of the Greeks and Romans, have become cultural ruins because of ACIDS. The ancient Chinese civilization could have become such a cultural ruin if the ruthless materialistic acquisitiveness of Chinese culture had not contacted the gust of spiritual fresh air of Buddhism. Here, one cannot fail to observe that the other-worldliness of Indian Buddhism became the Tang intellectuals' *this*-worldly spiritualism. Li Bo and many of the other Tang poets were spiritually inclined to the lofty ideas and ideals of Buddhism, but materially they were deeply rooted in the mundane world, which was what he meant by *nīlotpala-upāsaka*.

Another typical example of such a Sino-Indian other-this-worldly synthesis was the great Tang poet, Bai Juyi (772-846), who also named himself 'Letian', the Chinese translation of 'Devānanda' (celestial happiness), and arrogated two Sino-Indian titles: (1) 'Letian jushi', i.e., 'Devānanda-upāsaka' (a lay devotee of celestial happiness), and (2) 'Xiangshan jushi',

i.e., ‘Gandhamādana-upāsaka’ (a lay devotee of the incense mountain). Bai Juyi openly professed his faith in the teaching of ‘Kongmen’ (Gate of the Void), i.e., Buddhism, and said that when he would be recalled by God, he would return to the Tasita Heaven of Śākyamuni.⁶ Bai Juyi’s Buddhist mentality can be illustrated by the following poems :

How to describe the pains
of a house on fire ?
My tiny heart now remains
a pile of ashes of desire.⁷

To this he added :

Ever since entering the Voidness Gate
I have exerted efforts ultimate
to the dharma emulate.
I have tried to annihilate
my myriad cravings innate.
Only the devil of poetry
has resisted vigorously.
Whenever there is scenery
there’s my muse automatically.⁸

In another poem addressing a friend Bai Juyi rhymed :

You are deeply conscious
treading on Enlightened Road.
I have a little faith precious
in the Dhyana Gate mode.
While of the diseases unaware,
it’s time to be relieved.
After Voidness being conceived,
stay put no more in its fair.⁹

The three quotations provide a glimpse that not only was the poet a true follower of Buddhism, but the ‘Dhyāna Gate’ (*chanmen*), i.e., the popular Chinese Buddhism known as Chan Buddhism (the progenitor of Japanese Zen), was a prevailing moral force among the Chinese intellectuals of his time. And we see that Bai Juyi was composing his poems to propagate Buddhism as well as to assert himself as a leader of this India-imported faith. This helps us to discover the source of immortality of Tang poetry. Great Tang masters, like Wang Wei, Li Bo and Bai Juyi, and

many others, were men who can best be described as 'upāsaka poets' who were lay devotees quite mundane in their way of life, but extremely powerful preachers of the Indian metaphysical value system. This fact resulted in the masterpieces of Tang poetry emerging as a collective saga of spiritual enlightenment, anti-war sentiments, sympathy to the down-trodden, particularly the peasants and women, and sharp criticism of government tyranny. These Tang masterpieces are the embodiment of a trans-Himalayan cultural affinity. They, in turn, spread their wings to reach Korea, Japan and Vietnam, and other Asian countries and became a common intercultural inspiration. Buddhism and Chinese poetry thus joined Confucianism to lay the foundation of an edifice of East Asian interculturalness nicknamed in western academic circles as the 'Sinic zone', but should be more appropriately designated as the 'Sino-Indic zone'.

Both the popularization of Buddhism in China and the flowering of poetry in Tang had benefited from the arrival of 'temple culture' from India to China. By temple culture I mean the temple occupying the central place in cultural activities and an unending flow of resources and talents to the temple to maintain the magnificence of the temple premises. In the Indian tradition, which is still alive today, temples occupy a central place in literature, arts, music, dance and handicrafts. Before the immigration of Buddhism, China had not known such a temple culture. There was only a 'palace culture' absorbing substantial resources and man-power as well as artistic talents to build up the grandeur of the imperial palace which the common people were not even privileged to peep at. Chinese peasants hated this palace culture. Whenever their rebellious army stormed the imperial capital they invariably razed the palaces to the ground. The Tang rulers were wise enough to adopt the Indian temple culture while maintaining the palace culture. The reigning Tang Empress Wu (684-704) not only built magnificent Buddhist temples, but also frequented the temple premises and turned such royal visits into poetry sessions. One of her majesty's favourite spots was Dayanta (the Great Swan Pagoda) in the imperial capital, Chang'an (which was built to commemorate the triumphant return of monk Xuanzang's pilgrimage to India). By the ninth century the wall of the premises of this pagoda (a huge architectural wonder which stands as a tourist attraction even today) were fully covered with poems written in fine calligraphy. The calligraphers were candidates for the imperial examination and many of them distinguished themselves later as eminent imperial officers and poets.

This gave the Buddhist monument an added splendour as a cultural centre.

Thus, the arrival of temple culture in China became a boon to the development of Tang poetry. Tang poets were fond of visiting the Buddhist temples and composing poems for such visits. Bai Juyi, who was both a temple-builder and temple-visitor, left a good number of poems about the Buddhist shrines and their keepers. In the following piece we can see the intimate connection between his poetic mood and temple culture :

Dress and food I have without want.
Both joy and worry do not haunt.
If after I die something may happen,
I make no demands on fellow men.
With eyes closed I softly chant the scriptures.
My leisure is spent in greeting Dhyana masters.
There's surplus mood for touring mountain heights.
Several trips a year to the Dragon Gate.¹⁰

Longmen (the Dragon Gate) was and still is one of the world's famous sites of Buddhist caves to which the Tang Empress Wu had made a substantial contribution. Bai Juyi himself built the famous Xiangshan Temple on the hill overlooking these caves. Every visit to Longmen heightened his enlightened thought and poetic inspiration.

Bai Juyi's contemporary, Li She, who was a notable poet of standing, shared Bai's intimacy with temple culture. One of his last poems reveals his having settled down in the temple Shan'guangsi (Temple of benevolent light) which reads :

My fate has long married India in the clouds.
In old age, towards the Jade Spring* I move my house.
Perchance, if I obtain Nirvana early in this shrine,
I am saved many years' *sūtra*-reading, that's fine.¹¹

Another ramification of the Tang temple culture was the emergence of a new vogue called 'sujiang' (vulgar preaching), i.e., Buddhist preachers using the Indian technique of story-telling in their sermons. Indian Buddhist scriptures (for that matter, all Indian holy books) were eighty percent stories and twenty percent philosophy. Vivid story-telling has

*the abode of afterlife.

been the Indian style of religious preaching from ancient times till today. The Tang Chinese Buddhists in their zeal to universalize the new teaching among the illiterate masses of China were quick in adopting this skill which proved very effective. Large crowds of audience were drawn by such vivid story-telling sermons in the Buddhist shrines with the audience spilling over to the streets causing traffic jams in the capital, Chang'an, one of the biggest political and commercial centres of the world at that time. Apart from the administrative problems caused by such sermons for the municipal authorities, the high society of Tang looked at this novel experiment with a strange feeling, for it was unthinkable to tradition-minded Chinese intellectuals to treat religious teaching in such an atmosphere, an atmosphere that lacked the solemn dignity that was required. They were also shocked by the unprecedented popularity of such a novel method of preaching. Hence such an innovation was branded as 'vulgar'.

Vulgar, indeed, it was in the sense that it carried the cultural pollen to the populace. The days of culture being the monopolized cosmetics of the elegant society were over. Story-telling soon became an important form of entertainment among Chinese town-folks, and distinguished itself as an eminent Little Tradition. During the succeeding Song Dynasty from the tenth to the thirteenth century, 'shuohua' (story-telling) became a profession with the theatres coming up in the cities to provide a venue for this popular entertainment. Meanwhile, the imperial examination system initiated by the Tang Dynasty became a mixed bag during Song. Chinese intellectuals were lured to dedicating their life-span in studying the syllabi of the examination with an ambition to become power-brokers (as there was no age limit, nor restrictions on the number of attempts) on the one hand, and on the other, found the gate of admission to officialdom too narrow for most of them to enter. The 'drop-outs' of the imperial examination were drawn into the story-telling trade to earn their living. Thus, there was a mobilization of culture and scholarship downwards from the Great Tradition to the Little Tradition.

Even during Tang, Buddhism had already provided such a platform for Chinese intellectuals to reach the Little Tradition. The Buddhist organizations produced their own intellectuals who had to perform the duties of reading, copying, preaching and translating the scriptures. The 'vulgar preaching', which we have alluded to a little while ago, actually required an intensive intellectual exercise including the writing down of the

script for oral delivery. In the beginning of this century, we discovered from the Dunhuang caves a new genre of ancient Chinese literature which had not been known for centuries. This is the famous 'Bianwen' literature. These are stories written by anonymous authors (the majority of them must be Buddhist monks) which are refreshingly untraditional. The stories are either drawn from Buddhist scriptures or from the non-Buddhist history that has a Buddhist moral. The language is unprecedentedly colloquial. Another alien feature of Bianwen is the planned blending of verses with prose narration which was an ancient Indian style, not Chinese. All these characteristics make a clear manifestation that this is a Sino-Indian cultural hybridization. There is a suspicion which has to be substantiated by research on historical evidence, viz., the new genre must have started as the script of the 'vulgar preaching' in the Tang Buddhist temples, hence a direct product of the newly introduced temple culture.

Many Chinese and foreign scholars have come to the conclusion that this Bianwen literature was the pioneer of a new literary trend in China which is described as 'vulgar literature' (*suwenxue*). Whereas before the rise of Bianwen prose had been an exclusive instrument of historical narration and philosophical discourse in Chinese literature, the post-Bianwen scene witnessed a new emerging literature of the colloquial, non-elegant and non-sophisticated, populist presentation of vivid stories. By the end of Song in the thirteenth century there already appeared the rough version of a great novel about the romance of the three kingdoms which was given the final artistic form as a great novel by Luo Guanzhong in the fourteenth century. As far as our knowledge goes, this was the birth of the novel in world literature. China's having the honour of producing the first novels of the world is another ramification of the beneficial effect of the Sino-Indian cross-cultural interaction. Both the temple culture and the Bianwen literature contributed to it.

Coming down to the modern times we have another example of Sino-Indian interliterariness in the Chinese response to Rabindranath Tagore. Of course, the impact of ancient Indian culture had been digested by China following the gradual internalization of Buddhism into the Chinese cultural organism. Contacts between the two countries began to decrease after Tang and the Chinese memories of India began to fade. As India was one of the first Asian countries to surrender to western colonialism, she no longer inspired the Chinese intellectuals in the nineteenth century as an object for emulation. The sudden winning of the Nobel Prize by Tagore in

1913 once again served as an eye-opener. Chinese intellectuals received this news with considerable excitement not only because Tagore registered a break-through in the complete domination of western cultures and the oppressive pressure of the White Man's Burden, but also because of his emitting a ray of hope for the Chinese intellectuals who had been suffering from the Defeated Culture Syndrome. It was Tagore who helped the Chinese intellectuals to retrieve partially their confidence in their own cultural strength. Moreover, Tagore also refreshed the forgotten memories of ancient Sino-Indian cultural affinity.

Tagore himself was an admirer of ancient Chinese culture. He was influenced by the Tang poets through reading translated versions of their masterpieces. The Tang poets had received from ancient Indian culture the primacy of spiritualism and the teaching of compassion which, in turn, helped to reinforce China's ethics of harmony. The Tang poets' harmony with Nature became a feedback for Tagore. In a way, Tagore was twentieth century India's *upāsaka*-poet who shared certain idiosyncracies of the fore-runners of Tang China. There were affinities between Tagore and the Tang intellectuals' universalism contained in different religious teachings, between Tagore and Li Bo's rebellion against the formal educational system, between Tagore and the Tang poets' sensitivities to the charm and dynamism of Nature, between Tagore and Bai Juyi's empathy and sympathy for the down-trodden. Tagore was known for being a philosopher-poet. This would mean that he was a modern and improved version of the Tang Chinese *upāsaka*-poets who had been virtual preachers of Buddhist idealism without donning the monk's robe and bearing the rigour of the order's discipline.

Understandably, it was the philosophical aspect of Tagore's poetry that inspired the *avant garde* Chinese poets most. It was no accident that the first movement in China's new poetry was named 'xinyue' (the crescent moon) which took a leaf out of Tagore's famous book of poems. Among the Chinese "Crescent Moon School" (*xinyuepai*) there emerged some of the most outstanding Chinese poets of the new style, Xu Zhimo (1896-1931), Wen Yiduo (1899-1946) and others. Tagore's influence on these Chinese poets is easy to illustrate. Tagore sang: "Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it into the deepest fullness. Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe." (*Gitanjali*, LXXXVII). This Wen Yiduo echoed:

Let me be drowned in the waves of your eyes !

Let me be burnt dead in the furnace of your heart !

Let me drink to death in the wine of your music !

Let me be stifled to death in the fragrance of your breath !¹²

Another pioneer of China's new poetry was Xie Bingxin, the author of two famous collections : *Fanxing* (Crowded stars, 1921) and *Chunshui* (Spring water, 1922) which played an important part in the development of China's new poetry. Xie Bingxin herself admitted that these two works were her attempts to emulate Tagore's *Stray Birds*. Listen to a couple of specimens of her echoes from Tagore :

Oh sea,

Which star has no light ?

Which flower has no fragrance ?

Which tide in my mind

has not the clear sound of your waves ?

— *Fanxing*, 131

Creator —

If in the eternal life

there is only one promise of extreme happiness,

I will demand this with utmost sincerity :

'I lie in the bosom of mother,

mother lies in the boat,

boat lies in the ocean of lunar brightness.'

— *Chunshui*, 105

Yet the greatest Chinese beneficiary of Tagore's philosophical poetry was Guo Moruo (1892-1978) who was a kind of China's Tagore. Guo had been struggling on the verge of suicide in 1916. He tried to read Chinese philosophers like Zhuangzi and Wang Yangming, and also the Old and New Testaments to liberate himself from his serious intention of committing suicide. There was no help. It was by reading Tagore that finally he discovered "the life of life" and "the spring of life". He composed two poems on the subject of suicide. The first poem in the classical style written in 1916 and entitled 'Xunsi' (Seeking death) is a depiction of his going out of the house to die and his returning home with timidity. The second poem written in the new style and entitled "Side youhuo" (Enticement of death) is a significant piece which I translate as follows :

I have a small knife

standing by the window beaming at me.

She says to me with a smile :

'Moruo, don't burn your heart !
 Come quickly and kiss my lips,
 I can get rid of your worries.'
 Blue, blue sea waves outside my window
 yelling at me with an unceasing roar.
 She calls me and says :
 'Moruo, don't burn your heart !
 Throw yourself quickly into my bosom,
 I can get rid of your worries.'¹³

We notice in this poem the arrival of another Tagore-like philosophical poet who discovered the metaphysical solution to his life's problems. His understanding of Tagore's meaning of "the life of life" enabled him to see the void of the threat of death. After composing this poem both the knife and the sea were bereft of their threat to his life, and he regained his power of resistance to the enticement of death. How powerful the force of literature is ! Yet, Tagore's poetry was not the only source of such inspiration of life available to Guo Moruo. The Tang poetry was a rich fountainhead of such inspiration. Perhaps it was difficult for Guo Moruo to locate the scattered works of the Tang poets. Also Tagore's was a more concentrated dosage about the meaning of life than the message of any individual Tang poet. But, whether it came to Guo Moruo from Tagore or from the Tang poets, it was essentially the same message of spiritualism. Thus, it was Tagore who presented the link of the horizontal continuity of the trans-Himalayan humanism between the Tang poets and the modern Chinese poets like Guo Moruo.

Perhaps I have quite comprehensively dealt with the Sino-Indian interculturalness though not in terms of a complete historical survey. This is a field which has a vast scope and a great significance in the understanding of the two cultures with their long and rich traditions. Unfortunately, the area has not yet attracted any sizable input of research resources. I hope for the Indian comparatists there are no pastures yonder that look greener. There is so much treasure of interculturalness nearer home that needs the widest and deepest excavation. The paradox of only a few Far Western academics being interested in the trans-Himalayan cross-cultural activities whereas most of the Indian and Chinese experts on literature are scavenging on the trans-Atlantic frontlines must be reversed, and the sooner the better. This is not an advocacy for cultural parochialism. Even courtesy demands that one should first understand one's own back-

ground thoroughly before sticking out one's neck too far. But, if you don't occupy your own ground, others will. That is why there have been two basketfuls of distortions of which Tagore's intercourse with China provides the example of one little swallow making a whole summer. Isn't this warning enough against neglecting Sino-Indian studies ?

NOTES

- 1 Pei Puxian, *Zhong-Yin wenxue yanjiu* (Studies on Sino-Indian interliterariness) (Taipei, 1968), p. 165.
- 2 Xiang Da, *Tangdai Chang'an yu xiyu wenming* (The Tang Chang'an city and the civilizations lying to its west) (Beijing, 1957), pp. 117-22.
- 3 Tan Chung, "Civilizing influence of tea", in *idem*, *Triton and Dragon : Studies on Nineteenth Century China and Imperialism* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 16-21.
- 4 *Quan Tangshi* (Collected Tang poetry) (reprint, Beijing, 1979), Vol. IV, p. 1813.
- 5 *Ibid*, Vol. VII, p. 2259.
- 6 *Ibid*, Vol. XIV, p. 5234.
- 7 *Ibid*, Vol. XIII, p. 4906.
- 8 *Ibid*, p. 4895.
- 9 *Ibid*, Vol. XIV, p. 5181.
- 10 *Ibid*, p. 5083.
- 11 *Ibid*, p. 5439.
- 12 *Wen Yiduo quanji* (Collected works of Wen Yiduo) (Beijing, 1982), Vol. III, p. 241.
- 13 *Guo Moruo quanji* (Collected works of Guo Moruo) (Beijing, 1982), *Wenxue bian* (Literature), Vol. I, p. 137.

SYSTEMS THINKING AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Andre Lefevere

In many cultures literature has traditionally been studied for two main reasons. One to offer role-models to the (young) members of the culture and, in doing so, to influence their behaviour in certain situations in such a way that it would not be harmful, or be even positively beneficial to the culture as a whole. Two, to teach members of a culture how to write well, i.e. effectively, by imitating and/or emulating the way in which those recognized by that culture as great writers, wrote what they have written. Hence, of course, the composition of anthologies and their use in teaching, with the concomitant problems of which writers to pick, and which of their works.

These two traditional reasons for teaching literature are increasingly seen as less and less relevant to the West. First of all, "the reading of works of literature appears to be playing every day a less and less important role in our culture generally. The complex social function performed in Elizabethan and Jacobean England by going to the theater and in Victorian England by the reading of novels is performed these days by other activities, mostly, so it seems, by watching television."¹ Second, since other media tend to be more and more effective in getting all kinds of models and messages across, it is no longer of primordial importance to teach people to write and speak well.

Not only, then, do the canons of literature exert less social influence than they used to in the past, but the very composition of those canons is no longer a self-evident matter. Nobody who values his or her peace of mind and/or peaceful retirement will feel called upon to put together a canon of English, German, French, Italian and other literatures these

days. The general tendency seems, rather, to pay lip service to some 'great tradition' or other, while teaching and writing about what you feel comfortable with because it has been written about so often. Even "deconstruction is conservative as far as the canon goes"². Indeed, it has a vested interest in being that way, since the only way to say relatively new things about the old staples of the canon is to tackle them from all kinds of new critical angles. The more, one might say, the merrier.

There are, in general, two kinds of reactions to this state of affairs in the West. One is to ignore it, and to act as if nothing much has changed, while making certain minor concessions on the fringe (e.g. the odd film course in the literature department). To people who feel comfortable with this kind of reaction, canons still "play the role of institutionalization: they provide examples of what ideals can be, of how people have used them as stimuli and contexts for their own self-creation, and of when acts in the present can address more than the present."³ Yet even they seem to sense a (growing ?) lack of social relevance where their canons are concerned. They admit that it is difficult to gain real authority for the canon in the contemporary West, because to do that it is necessary "to convince large segments of those who wield social power that they should submit themselves to the judgments fostered by an ideal community. This difficulty is one of the many reasons canons are not sufficient instruments for social change."⁴ The other reaction is to by and large accept the loss of social relevance incurred, and to continue the "retreat from the marketplace" that began with the retreat of literary criticism to the academy during the last century. In its mild form this reaction, too, amounts to little more than business as usual, even though the heart is no longer in it: "the theory industry grinds along, and books, articles, and symposia multiply, but much of the material seems arid and unreal, out of phase with concrete issues in critical practice and pedagogy, and out of touch with human needs and interests."⁵ In its more rabid form, this kind of reaction tends to extend the perceived lack of validity in literary studies to other areas of intellectual endeavour, and to conclude that we might as well make the best of it, since we are all in the same boat, anyway. This, then, would indeed be "a strategy for taking up the crisis in the academy in a self-preserving act which ... fuels the institution with its own impotence."⁶

Both reactions, interestingly, rely on the inertial mass of institutionalization to shelter themselves from the necessity to really face the chal-

lenge mounted outside these institutions. This, then, may well be the reason for a certain continuing reluctance to look at the institutional basis of much of what is going on in literary studies in the West today : it may, indeed, turn out not to be wise to saw off the branch you happen to be sitting on. On the other hand, it appears more and more likely that the way out of the "crisis in criticism" lies not with more of the same, i.e. more and more interpretations of works belonging to a hazier and hazier canon, but in a "resocialization of literary studies"⁷. This resocialization, then, needs to recognize the idea of the autonomy of criticism (and theory) (and, indeed, the autonomy of literary studies as a whole), as "a persistent illusion that has prevented criticism from taking a clear look at itself."⁸

If we do, indeed, take a closer look at the institutionalization of what we are doing, chances are that the present 'crisis' in criticism may lead to the kind of shift of emphasis within literary studies that might give them a new lease on life. We would, then, give up interpreting texts for the sake of interpreting them, and we would start seeing texts within the wider context of the culture that produces them, while paying special attention to those within the culture texts. We would, in other words, come to realize that "classic texts, while they may or may not originally have been written by geniuses, have certainly been written and rewritten by the generations of professors and critics who make their living by them. They are the mirrors of culture as culture is interpreted by those who control the literary establishment."⁹ And, we might add, not just the literary establishment, but the establishment pure and simple. We must, in other words, come to terms with the role or roles played by power in cultures or, if you prefer, semiological systems. To do so, we could do worse than follow the examples of both Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. "By reminding us of the artificiality and undeniably arbitrary status of semiological systems ... Barthes reminds us not only of their unnatural status (they are modes of discourse given to us neither by God nor by the nature of things) but also of the much-avoided (because uncomfortable) corollary that these systems are put into operation, put into force *by force*. Vast, diffuse and nearly anonymous 'deciding groups', establishments of power, in so elaborating the perimeters and structures of a language, define our ways of thinking and behaving and our norms of value : the individual has no say, and neither does that sentimental construction called 'the people'."¹⁰ Foucault, on the other hand, refines the notion of power in semiological systems by pointing out that the positive part it plays can be

much greater than the negative part immediately associated with it, which tends to call censorship and worse to mind. "If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse."¹¹

A new discourse on literary studies (also licensed, of course, by the institutions created for it by those in power) would react in a third way to the loss of relevance ascribed to literature and literary studies at the beginning of this paper. Since models and idea(l)s are communicated more effectively outside of literature (even though other media will still use literary texts as their basis), and since those engaged in literary studies no longer see it as their task to inculcate models and ways of behaviour, they become free to look at the ways in which literature is designed to inculcate these models and ways of behaviour, while leaving the reader free to do with models and ways of behaviour as he pleases. If we no longer interpret individual texts with a view to influencing people's lives, we may begin to look at the factors which make a culture shape works of literature in such a way that they reflect at least some of its values. We may then begin to realize that a society may need to rewrite older works that are seen to belong to its canon, or works imported from different societies, in a way that is compatible with the values perceived as either dominant or peripheral in it at a certain stage in its history. We would then also begin to realize that the part played by 'rewriters', such as critics, translators, anthologizers and historiographers is of vital importance in any attempt to integrate a text into a culture. The study of the functioning of literary texts inside a culture therefore becomes a study in manipulation, the relevance of which is not far to seek "in the most manipulative culture human beings have ever experienced".¹²

It is obvious that any attempted "resocialization of literature" of this kind is in need of methodology that will have to be different from current methodologies in that it will have to be able to deal with such elements as power and the discourses it creates, the institutions in which those discourses flourish or come to grief, and the power of rewriting in the introduction of texts generated outside a given discourse into that discourse. I have stated in various papers that I would regard a methodology inspired by systems thinking as a good candidate for this function because

the concept of system allow us to describe power in its various ramifications. It also allows us to describe power in a fairly 'neutral' way, i.e. one that does not immediately unleash all kinds of passions, particularly when we are trying to describe a situation in which two systems interact, or have interacted. It would allow us to describe these kinds of situations without recourse to terms like 'inferior' or 'superior', 'right' or 'wrong'. We would still be using words like 'dominant' and 'dominated', but they would be understood as technical terms. We could, in other words, describe these situations in a manner that does justice to the relativity of all systems, precisely by focusing on the power that is the central category in them all. By making use of a methodology known and used in other discourses that make up our present system, we would certainly not "insulate, if not isolate, literary study from other spheres of contemporary knowledge",¹³ thereby constructively reversing a trend that does not do literary studies much good, since a society will, in the end, abandon those subsystems which are not perceived as productive any longer. The fate of astrology, which went from a respected discipline to a relatively obscure hobby for quacks in not too long a lapse of time, should give us pause.

Far from being rigid and more than slightly sinister, a system is in a state of continuous tension and change. If a society can be described as a system, it will consist of different subsystems, such as literature, medicine, law, each with its own discourse. In each of these systems as, indeed, in society as a whole, there will be those who are roughly happy with things as they are, and those who want change. Those in power in a society will, therefore, have to see to it that they achieve and maintain some kind of equilibrium, both between the various individuals who make up the society as a whole. Those in power will, therefore, indicate the parameters they regard as acceptable for the discourses in the various subsystems and they will do so on the basis of what is commonly called ideology, but which is by no means a rigid and monolithic 'given' either. Rather "ideology, we might tentatively claim, is a set of discourses which wrestle over interests which are in some way relevant to the maintenance or interrogation of power structures central to a whole form of social and historical life."¹⁴

If the whole society, the whole system is, therefore, controlled on the basis of 'ideology', the various subsystems are, in their turn, controlled by those who have become 'experts' in them. The various subsystems

have, historically, evolved their own specific discourse, which determines what is valid or not, what is worth pursuing or not inside a given subsystem: "any intellectual system permits certain questions to be raised while rejecting others as irrelevant."¹⁵ Chemists, for example, no longer seem to feel they have to investigate the putative existence of 'phlogiston', just as fewer literary journals are still likely to print speculations as to the size of the Macbeth family. If the whole society, then, is controlled on the basis of ideology by those we shall call 'patrons', the literary system inside a society is controlled on the basis of a poetics by those we shall call 'rewriters', i.e. the translators, the critics, the historiographers and anthologizers of literature. A poetics, then, is the code by which a literary system operates, which sets the parameters for the writing of literature and, to a certain extent also, the discourse on literature, in a certain society at a certain time. A poetics consists of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, symbols, prototypical characters and situations; the other is a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in society. This concept plays an important part in the selection of themes which must be relevant to society for a work of literature to be noticed. The theme of the "maiden seduced and abandoned", for example, long a staple theme in the western novel, has been made largely obsolete, except for comic relief, by advances in the technology of birth control.

Needless to say, neither a given ideology nor a given poetics is eternal. They are historical phenomena and, as such, liable to change. Indeed the tension in both the social and the literary systems originates in differences of opinion about the viability of a certain ideology, a certain poetics, and these differences of opinion not infrequently lead to a struggle for the domination of either system. An ideology, a poetics which occupied a central position inside a system may be demoted and become peripheral or even disappear. Nazism, for example, ran through the whole course of peripheral to central to peripheral in little more than 27 years. Romanticism, on the other hand, took markedly longer to displace Neoclassicism and then lasted much longer in its central position.

In the literary system, rewriters are in charge of the discourse, i.e. their "function is to preserve or reproduce discourse, but in order that it should circulate within a closed community, according to strict regulations."¹⁶ Rewriters reach their position as 'experts' after a more or less 'long march' through the institutions society has created: they write

Ph.D's, books and articles, they teach and form their own schools and they go to conferences to proselytize. Patrons are, as a rule, not very concerned with the specifics of the discourse of a given system as long as it does not go beyond ideologically acceptable parameters. Patrons take care of rewriters and experts in other fields in that they provide them with economic subsistence and a certain status. Patronage can be exerted by persons (not necessarily just the Medici, Maecenas or Louis XIV), groups of persons (a religious body, say, or a political party), a social class, a royal court, publishers and/or the non-literary media. Rewriters who represent the 'reigning orthodoxy' at any time in the development of a literary system are close to the ideology of the patrons dominating that phase in the history of their society. To put it somewhat more bluntly: "The history of literature is to a great extent the history of the generosity of individual rulers and aristocrats."¹⁷ And of course also the history of their lack of generosity towards those they did not elect to support. Nor should that history be limited to rulers and aristocrats, for that relegates the part played by patronage in literary systems much too firmly to a distant, and therefore safe, past while obscuring the fact that the function of patronage, once performed mainly by rulers and aristocrats, remains a major factor to be reckoned with in any literary system. It simply has been taken over by patrons of a different kind in a later stage of historical evolution. In the past (and in totalitarian societies of the present), the economic and the status components of patronage were often bestowed by one and the same person or institution. With the split between 'high' and 'low' culture in the West economic gratification often does not necessarily entail status among the rewriters.

Once more, it goes without saying that the system is not rigid and deterministic: writers and rewriters may go against the prevailing ideology if they so wish, but they do so at their own risk and peril. Many, therefore, and not of the meanest, elect to stay within the parameters given. Consider the role of the 'Essex rebellion' in English literature, for example: the Earl of Essex attempts to remove Queen Elizabeth's 'evil counsellors' by force. He fails to do so and is tried for high treason and executed. (Read: Within a given patronage group, one faction tries to redefine the ideological parameters to its advantage; it does not succeed and is eliminated.) The Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare had dedicated *The Rape of Lucrece*, is executed with him. Shakespeare's company had been paid to perform *Richard II* the day before the rebellion,

prompting Elizabeth to remark : "I am Richard II, know ye not that ?"¹⁸ Shakespeare had written *Troilus and Cressida* during or just after the Essex rebellion. The fact that Essex could easily be seen as Achilles in the play, and Southampton as Patroclus, "was not appreciated, or not fully appreciated, until it was ready for performance—at which point, when Shakespeare and his fellows asked themselves whether they might give offence, it was deemed prudent not to proceed."¹⁹ (Read : The writer prefers not to offend the victorious faction in the patronage group and decides to wait for a propitious change before producing the play.) Similarly, in 1601, Fulke Greville destroyed his play *Antony and Cleopatra*, "seeing the like instance not poetically, but really fashioned in the Earle of *Essex* then falling ... This sudden descent of such greatness ... stir'd up the Authors second thoughts, to bee carefull (in his owne case)."²⁰

Or take another case of patronage setting ideological parameters. The power is now no longer that of a monarch and her court, but much more mundanely, though no less effectively, that of Charles Mudie and W. H. Smith. "The censorious, moralistic owners of the two major circulating libraries (in Victorian England), Mudie and Smith effectively monopolized Victorian literary production, determining both the form and character of what was actually written. Both men actively intervened in the selection of books for their libraries, and regarded themselves as the protectors of public morality."²¹ They also insisted on the form of the novel in three volumes, which was to be the bane of many a Victorian novelist and was responsible for a lot of what is now decried as 'padding' in Victorian fiction. Witness the following contemporary remark : "Messieurs and mesdames the critics are wont to point out the weakness of second volumes ; they are generally right, simply because a story which would have made a tolerable book (the common run of stories) refuses to fill three books."²²

That writers have always been aware of the client/patron relationship in which they have found themselves, can easily be illustrated by a few random quotations. The first one is a couplet written by Hugo Primas, a twelfth century poet writing the following Latin couplet addressed to a patron who obviously did not give him all he wanted : "You offal of the clergy, dregs of the bishops, stupid fool / Who gave me a coat without lining in the heart of winter."²³ A few centuries later, the French poet Du Bellay writes : "Be wise, and satisfied with the judgment of those / Who find

everything good, who you want to please / Who are able to advance you in goods and positions / Who can give you rich earnings."²⁴ And, finally, here is Goethe's Tasso, describing the court of Ferrara : "Here is my fatherland, here is the circle / In which my soul is pleased to dwell / I listen here, I pay attention to every hint / Here speak the voices of experience, wisdom and taste."²⁵

Or take the case of two writers switching from one kind of patronage to another. John Gower, Chaucer's contemporary, "was an independent country gentleman, whose means allowed him to write in Latin, French and English verse in the hopes of edifying his countrymen. Even so, his English work, the *Confessio Amantis*, as he tells us, was written in response to a direct request by Richard II for 'som new thing', and when it was completed Gower wrote a final passage praising the King. Some years later, the poet found it expedient to omit this passage and to insert a new preface, praising Henry IV!"²⁶ who had replaced Richard II on the throne. Gower obviously was not in direct need of the economic side of patronage, but he wanted to make sure that he would be counted among those who espoused the right ideology, for the time being.

Similarly, in February 1817 the London publishing house of Sherwood, Neely and Jones published the poet Southey's early drama *Wat Tyler*, originally written in 1794, for the first time. In the meantime, Southey had changed over from the radical to the conservative ideological side and, not to needlessly antagonize his new patrons, he tried to get an injunction forbidding the publication of his youthful radical work. The judge refuses, but the publishers withdraw the book anyway. Immediately afterwards, though, Hone publishes the play at the same price, together with a preface attacking Southey as an apostate to liberty. "The radical campaign to discomfit the laureate (Southey had become Poet Laureate of England) and the ministers for whom he spoke continued with ever cheaper editions, some of which sold for as little as twopence. Sales were rumored to have reached as high as sixty thousand copies, far exceeding the success of any of Southey's legitimate poems."²⁷

Or, take an illustration from the specific discourse of the literary system. In his *Parzival*, I, 478 ff, Wolfram von Eschenbach apologizes to the reader for the fact that "other stories about Artus, the Knight of May, always take place around pentecost or among the blossoms of May. He is always allowed to breathe the sweet air of May. In this story, on the other hand, things get a little confused since I mention both the month of May and

the falling of snow in one and the same breath.”²⁸ Similarly, and perhaps an even more telling example : after describing a tournament down to the very last detail, Wolfram exclaims : “How happy I would be if I could see the kind of clash I depict in my story with my own eyes, just once.”²⁹

It is also significant that writers are highly aware of the restrictive nature of the poetics of their time, i.e. they know what is acceptable and what is not, and they often know that they are mainly running variations on a theme. The Provençal poet Gui d’Ussel, for example, states quite openly : “I’ll say the same in another manner, / That way my song will appear new.”³⁰ Given the basic situation of theme and variation, writers also know that nothing is, in the end, really new, that everything needs to be expressed within the parameters of the accepted discourse, which may change gradually in their functional components, but tend to change much less fast in their inventory component. Musset put it succinctly as follows : “Nothing belongs to anything, everything belongs to everybody. / You must be ignorant like a school teacher / To flatter yourself that you have spoken one single word / That no one on this world said before you.”³¹

If we start thinking in terms of two systems in contact, or ‘interface’, things get much more complicated. We are then dealing with the interaction between the image one culture projects of itself in its literature and the image projected by another culture in its own literature. We have two sets of ideological parameters and two sets of poetics, two sets of patrons and two sets of rewriters. To make it all even more complicated, neither ideology nor poetics, neither patronage nor rewriters are monolithic entities. Those who feel unhappy with the ideology and/or the poetics of their own system will plan to use (rewrite) elements taken from the other system to further their own ends. On the other hand, those who are happy with things as they are will have little time for the other system. At most they will condescend to rewrite it in a belittling, or, more often, patronizing manner.

In the end, of course, the choices are, as always, circumscribed by power. The culture that dominates can pick and choose what it wants from the dominated culture, and can rewrite that culture in its own image, much as it can impose its own image on it, to a great extent. Needless to say, both images will be ideologically coloured, but the one the dominant system propagates of the dominated system will be much more influential than the one the dominated system creates of the dominant system. The dominated culture does have fewer choices : its members will have to

acquire the language of the dominant culture to some extent and they will have to learn to move within its universe of discourse with some assurance at least. As is well known, members of the dominated culture often tend to overdo this, in their desire to fit in, and this mode of behaviour is sure to give rise to an unending stream of anecdotes on the subject among members of the dominant culture.

In a literature the most productive roles in a situation of interface are played by those rewriters who, often unwittingly, create an 'historical moment' (or a 'window of opportunity', to coin a phrase) for a certain text or certain texts to move from one literature into another. If a (re) writer in culture A is attracted to a text in culture B, often because that text has either ideological or poetological characteristics (or both) he or she feels are lacking in his or her own work or culture, he or she will champion the cause of that text in his or her culture, with varying degrees of success according to the influence he or she is able to exert. Let me, in closing, illustrate this process with a few short remarks on Tagore's auto-translations.³²

Tagore's translations were introduced to England by William Rothenstein, who showed them to Yeats, who read the poems aloud, in Rothenstein's house, to a group including, among others, Ezra Pound. Yeats, the poet, thought he had found here "an innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature".³³ And these were, of course, precisely the features Yeats had been striving to attain in his own poetry. In the same introduction Yeats also 'naturalizes' Tagore within the dominant ideological parameters, by 'rewriting' him into a saint, a mystic from exotic India. That 'rewriting' of Tagore was made much more obvious, and the 'naturalization' proceeded to far greater lengths in the citation accompanying the award of the Nobel Prize to Tagore. That citation reads, in part: "The true inwardness of this work is most clearly and purely revealed in the efforts exerted in the Christian mission-field throughout the world.... More especially, the preaching of the Christian religion has provided in many places the first definite impulse toward a revival and regeneration of the vernacular language, i.e. its liberation from the bondage of an artificial tradition, and consequently also toward a development of its capacity for nurturing and sustaining a vein of living and natural poetry."³⁴ We are, in other words, faced with Tagore the crypto-Christian missionary! Yet, when the dominant poetics in English poetry changed soon after, Tagore's poetry was rejected on literary grounds,

whereas his speeches against nationalism put him well beyond the acceptable ideological parameters of the time.

The 'missionary' quotation highlights another recurrent feature of cultural interface. Powers within the dominant culture will want to disseminate what they consider its central ideology among the members of the dominated culture. To that end, they will often encourage literary expression among the members of the dominated culture, in their own language, and even promote it, on condition that it keeps well within the ideological parameters required.

I have given the reasons for sketching a methodology of literary studies that might be able to deal with a 'resocialized' study of literature, one that can accommodate such categories as power, rewriting and institutionalization. I have also given my reasons for espousing a methodology based on systems thinking. If we see literary texts again as produced at a certain time, in a certain place, under certain constraints both poetological and ideological in nature, we shall no longer fall into the trap of reading literature for its 'timeless truths', i.e. we shall no longer regard all literary works as "essentially agents of something greater than themselves that is itself uncircumscribed by historical context".³⁵ If we no longer read a literature for the role models and ideals it provides, the value of a civilization will no longer stand or fall with the perceived 'excellence' of its literary output. If, in other words, literature is again circumscribed by historical context, if its genesis can be analysed, rather than its timeless lessons learned, we are well on the way to a mental framework in which we can analyse literatures produced in different cultures and their interactions without being tied to the yardstick of 'timeless excellence' which needs to be claimed either by both, or in favour of one or the other. We shall then be able to see what ideological parameters one culture deems acceptable for its view of the other—think of the idealized view of India among the British before the publication of James Mill's *History* in 1818 and the distinctly less flattering view which began to prevail soon after. We shall also be able to see which features of the one culture were deemed acceptable by the other, and which were totally rejected. It will further be possible to analyse the ways in which the Universe of Discourse in which members of both cultures move clash, interact with, adapt to each other, even create a new, mixed Universe of Discourse, just as various degrees of mixing can be observed in both the languages in interface, not to mention mixed ideologies and mixed

poetics, or the transplantation of certain elements of culture A's poetics into culture B.

If we look at these things in this way categories like 'inferiority' or 'superiority' do not enter into the analysis, except at the most basic level which made the domination of one culture by the other possible in the end : that of technology. What we are left with, for the rest, is an inexhaustible stream of case-studies of cultural and literary manipulation, and those we can feel justified in offering to students who "need from us now the kind of knowledge and skill that will enable them to make sense of their worlds, to determine their own interests, both individual and collective, to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media."^{3 6}

NOTES

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- 2 Hillis Miller, in Eaves & Fischer, p. 120.
- 3 Charles Altieri, "An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon", in Robert von Hallberg (ed.), *Canons* (Chicago & London : University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.52.
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- 8 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Critical Inquiry and the Ideology of Pluralism", *Critical Inquiry*, VIII. 4 (1982), 610.
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CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND LITERARY JUDGEMENT

Ashok R. Kelkar

We propose to take a look — not a hard look but a look of care and concern — at the life history of a literary judgement, beginning with its birth in the excitement of an encounter between a literary work (a poem, a story, a play, an essay and so on as the case may be) and its recipient (listener or reader as the case may be) — and of course we mean an encounter and not just a passive intake (as when one uses a read to put oneself to sleep or gets through a text in preparing oneself for an examination). Passive intakes don't give birth to literary judgements. To its author a literary judgement appears as self-evident as any evidence tendered by his senses. A little later the author may not remain so sure. In any case a little later it has already passed into the public domain. And then we don't know what to do with it — it is a judgement-of-that-work and nothing more, it is irreducibly specific ; it is a judgement-by-this-person and nothing more, it is irreducibly subjective. We present and examine this impasse in the first section.

In the second section we discern the end of the tunnel. The judgement may be specific, but it is also explicitly, implicitly, or tacitly comparative-in-spirit — even as a poem, which is very unique, is at the same time eminently involved with other poems. The judgement may be subjective, but it is also explicitly, implicitly, or tacitly persuasive-in-intent — even as the encounter that it is born out of, which is very private, is at the same time eminently participative in the community's literary life. Arguing about literary judgements is possible : criticism is feasible : integrating judgements into a critical position is in good order.

We are past the end of the tunnel but not at the end of the journey.

Without lingering to find out the varied possibilities in taking up a critical position (we have done so elsewhere, Kelkar 1983), we take up the meta-critical problem : criticism of criticism, judgement about judgement, the taking up of one out of various metacritical positions. There are three of these : anarchism, relativism, and absolutism. We conclude by examining them with care and concern.

It may be noted in passing that, though we are going to speak of literary works and literary judgements, we could, with due modifications, be speaking of artistic works and artistic judgements in general.

1. *The Impasse of Literary Judgement*

I-A. Literary judgements are of three kinds : aesthetic judgements, critical judgements, and impressionistic judgements.

Aesthetic judgements attach aesthetic predicates to objects, gestures, works --

This is beautiful.

This is more beautiful than that.

This is pretty/elegant rather than beautiful.

This is ugly/sublime/ridiculous.

This work is great.

Aesthetic judgements are akin to ethical judgements such as --

This action is right/wrong, moral/immoral.

This situation/goal is morally satisfying/dissatisfying.

This person is virtuous/vicious, good/wicked.

Critical judgements attach critical predicates to cultural objects, gestures, works --

This has unity in diversity.

This expresses love.

This is sentimental.

This is to be understood as ironic.

Critical judgements are akin to cultural interpretations-of-facts such as --

This is good/bad manners.

This is good/bad grammar.

This is in/out of fashion.

This is lawful/unlawful.

This is a typical Petrarchan sonnet.

This is a passive sentence.

That is not cricket.

Impressionistic judgements attach impressionistic predicates to objects, gestures, works —

This is sweet/moving/hateful.

This is warm/cool/heavy/smooth.

This is too long/abrupt/slow-moving/spacious.

Impressionistic judgements are akin to perceptual judgements such as —

This is pink/multicoloured/coloured.

This is piping hot/lukewarm.

This is sweet/bitter/pungent.

This is cramped/something to make me queasy/painful.

Literary judgements of these three kinds differ from each other in certain ways. But they also resemble each other in other ways :

(1) Literary judgements are clearly not exclamations, such as —

Aha ! Ah ! Tcha ! Ugh ! Ouch !

Alas ! What ? !

They are not even aesthetic exclamations such as —

Beautiful ! Wonderful ! Fantastic !

It's beautiful !

This is ugly !

Exclamations lack negative counterparts. 'It's not beautiful' is not an aesthetic exclamation, it is an aesthetic judgement. Literary judgements certainly have negative counterparts and are therefore open to contradiction. They make claims that are open to dispute. Since they make claims, they presuppose a point of view. The dispute ultimately extends to the larger claim that the point of view is a point of vantage and so expected to yield valid judgements. (We shall return to this consideration later in section III-B.)

(2) Literary judgements are clearly not descriptions such as —

This is opaque/magnetized.

These are all round/square/parallel/on the same level/thirty in number.

They are not even technical descriptions such as —

This is parabolic.

This is hotter than that by 5° Celsius.

This is acidic with a pH value 2.5.

This is a marsupial mammal.

Indeed what they offer to us are not facts but interpretations-of-facts. They claim to offer not valid descriptions, but valid ascriptions. The point of view

underlying an ascription may be personal, communal, or human. Aesthetic judgements are personal or égo-centric ; critical judgements are communal or ethnocentric ; impressionistic judgements are human or anthropocentric.

(3) Literary judgements may have, in varied proportions, the element of appraisal or evaluation and the element of understanding or interpretation-of-text. (Note the oppositions : fact/interpretation-of-fact, description/ascription, and now evaluation/interpretation-of-text.) The characteristic problems that literary judgements bristle with are not confined to judgements that are primarily evaluative (such as, This is beautiful/ugly/great ; This is a major/minor classic). They also affect judgements that are primarily interpretative-of-text (such as, This is to be understood as ironic). Indeed the line between the two is hard to draw. A text-interpretative judgement has an evaluative claim embedded in it. (Thus, saying that this is to be understood as ironic amounts to saying that to understand this as ironic enhances the value of the text.) An evaluative judgement has a text-interpretative claim embedded in it. (Thus, saying that this is pretty rather than beautiful amounts to saying that this embodies perfection in parvitude rather than perfection in plenitude. Cf. Kelkar 1969.) Interpretation-of-text and evaluation feed on each other.

From now on we shall make no difference between evaluative literary judgements and text-interpretative literary judgements. By the term 'literary judgement' we shall refer chiefly to aesthetic and critical judgements without quite excluding impressionistic judgements.

(4) The person delivering a literary judgement, its author, cannot do so without direct acquaintance with the object, gesture, work to which the aesthetic, critical, or impressionistic predicate is being ascribed. In contrast, the author of an ethical judgement need not be, perhaps even should not be, the one committing the act. Again, the author of the cultural interpretation, namely, that this poem is a Petrarchan sonnet need not even have known the language. Literary judgements are rather closer to perceptual judgements in this respect. Two things seem to flow from this need for direct acquaintance—at least, they seem to be closely connected with that need—

(a) Such judgements are, as Kant realized, irreducibly specific. They cannot be drawn as conclusions from an argument of the following kind :

Anything that is a man is mortal.

This is something that is a man.

Therefore, this is mortal.

In respect of such judgements at least existence precedes essence.

(b) Such judgements are, again as the author of *The Critique of judgement* realized, irreducibly subjective. They cannot be drawn as conclusions from an argument of the following kind :

This is green to me.

I am a person with normal vision in my present state.

Therefore, this is green as such.

Here literary judgements appear to part company from perceptual judgements.

These two features—irreducible specificity and irreducible subjectivity—seem to be especially true of aesthetic and critical judgements as distinct from impressionistic judgements. The first feature shuts the door to concept-formation ; the second feature shuts the door to verification.

Could it be the case that these two characteristic features of literary judgements have something to do with the nature of literary works and of our responses to literary works ?

I-B. A literary work, being a work of art, is so unique. (Ānandavardhana, fl. 850, spoke of *apūrvavastunirmāṇa* ; the West made this discovery with the Romantics.) As Martin Buber points out so tellingly (1923 (1937 : 41-2)), technical and aesthetic analysis may demote the work of art from *Thou* to *It*, but the essential encounter between a person and a work of art, a 'spiritual being', is an I-Thou encounter. A poem is like a person. And yet, in spite of its uniqueness, a poem thrives in the company of other poems. Literary works are constantly involving each other. Intertextuality (a useful coinage from Kristeva 1968) is a basic fact of literary life.

When we looked at examples of aesthetic exclamations, we may have noticed two somewhat different shapes that these exclamations may take. There are pure exclamations such as—

Ah ! So beautiful ! How wonderful !

(These almost resemble certain perceptual judgements like—

It's dark here.

It gives me the shivers.

There are butterflies in the tummy.

It's eerie here.

in that they lack any real subject to attach the predicate to.)

And there are exclamatory statements such as—

This is so beautiful !

It's a beauty !

That's ridiculous !

As we pass from a pure exclamation to an exclamatory statement, we are already giving our response a local habitation in addition to the name. Then, as we pass from an aesthetic exclamation to an aesthetic judgement, we further recognize the possibility of comparison as in —

This is more beautiful than that.

This is more pretty than beautiful.

We may compare subjects as well as predicates. Now the claim that this is more beautiful than that amounts to the claim that if that is beautiful this most certainly is. From this it is but a step to saying —

If this isn't beautiful, then nothing is.

To call something beyond compare is only a rhetorical way of comparing it.

In short, aesthetic judgements have a dimension of comparison. This comparative dimension is even more insistently present in critical judgements and impressionistic judgements. Literary judgements may be irreducibly specific and resistant to concept-formation, but they are at the same time unavoidably comparative. Literary works (which occasion these judgements) may be unique, but they irresistibly invite comparison and intertextuality.

We have already made a distinction between aesthetic exclamations and aesthetic judgements. We now have to make another equally useful distinction — a distinction between an aesthetic judgement such as, 'This is beautiful', and an aesthetic report, such as —

So-and-so judges this to be beautiful.

This is widely judged to be beautiful.

I Judge it to be beautiful.

When a person says, 'This is beautiful', he is not merely implying that he finds this beautiful, but is saying something more — he is saying, 'This deserves to be found beautiful'. When one moves from the exclamation 'Beautiful !' or 'This is beautiful !' to the judgement 'This is beautiful', one is not merely laying oneself open to contradiction ('But it isn't') but one is also soliciting support by inviting another to agree ('Isn't it ?' 'Don't you see ?'). On the other hand, when one merely reports ('I find this beautiful'), one is laying oneself open to contradiction of a quite different sort ('But you don't' — suggesting that one has made a false report

merely to please another or to be with the crowd or to annoy or mock at somebody or to make a joke or for some such extraneous reason. Needless to say that if one were to utter what purports to be an aesthetic judgement which implies a false-to-fact report, the so-called aesthetic judgement is mere gas—it is vacuous and so not even open to contradiction. Similar observations can be made concerning the passage from critical and impressionistic reports to critical and impressionistic judgements.

Literary response is embedded in an encounter between the recipient and the literary work that is so very private—whether it is a sudden affair ('I fell in love with it') or a long-drawn-out one ('Like a person it grows upon me'). So the literary response is nothing if not authentic, it is irreducibly personal. At the same time, it cannot be thought of except as a participation in the literary life of the community. What confers literature-hood on a text is its being accepted as worthy of continual re-enacting within the community. (Whether this community is an elite minority or whether it is the community at large is beside the point.)

It will be seen now that, when a recipient is not satisfied with making his own judgement but simply has to invite another to see what he has seen and thus seek confirmation, this is not just a concession to a natural human failing but rather a pointer to something else, namely, that such an invitation is inherent in the very exercise of a literary judgement.

In short, aesthetic judgements and, even more so, critical judgements and impressionistic judgements have a dimension of persuasion. Literary judgements may be irreducibly subjective and resistant to verification, but they are at the same time unavoidably persuasive in intent. Literary responses (which give birth to these judgements) may be private and personal affairs, but they are also inevitably participative and sharable.

To sum up, literary judgements are not only irreducibly specific and irreducibly subjective but also (as if this were not embarrassing enough) unavoidably comparative and unavoidably persuasive. Literary works and literary responses appear to join this conspiracy—the literary works are unique but intertextual, the literary responses are personal but participative.

I-C. Now that is clearly an embarrassing, even intolerable situation. We have to find a way out of it. (Isn't it just what Kant's dictum would lead one to expect? Said he, "From the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing can ever be made.")

It is true that the predicate in a literary judgement resists concept-

formation. There is no way in which one could support judgements such as —

This is beautiful.

This has unity in diversity.

This is saccharine.

by means of arguments based on a description of the object, gesture, work being judged. If one were to argue, for example —

This is beautiful because its parts are well-proportioned.

one could always counter this by a question —

But what is it about having well-proportioned parts that makes something beautiful ?

(This extrapolation of G. E. Moore's argument about moral judgements to aesthetic judgements was first attempted by Edgar F. Carritt. See Carritt 1929, 1949, 1962.) But surely, if there is no way of describing what it is to be pink rather than crimson to a blind person, this does not entail that the adjectives are interchangeable and so probably synonymous. *Pretty*, *dainty*, *elegant* are distinct from each other and from *beautiful* both in their sense and in their range of applicability and at the same time these are all mutually comparable. Literary judgements may be irreducibly specific, but we have to find some way of matching the subjects with one another which are involved in such judgements.

Again, it is true that the author of a literary judgement cannot resort to verification and so that there is no way eliminating subjectivity. But surely, if the author of the judgement cannot 'show' that a certain work is beautiful, he cannot help hoping that the person being addressed will 'see' for himself that this is so. If the other person is not blind, one can't help saying, at least in an undertone, 'Can't one see that this is crimson rather than pink?' Literary judgements may be irreducibly subjective, but we have to find some way of getting two subjects to agree on at least some judgements.

II. *The Way Out : Criticism is Feasible*

II-A. The situation may be intolerable, but it is not utterly hopeless. The hope is based on reasons such as these.

(1) We have already seen that a literary judgement is open to contradiction. This immediately puts a constraint on the author of a literary judgement. He cannot contradict himself. One cannot say that this is red and at the same time and in the same respect this is not red, one cannot

even say that this is red and green at the same time and in the same respect. Similarly one cannot say that this is beautiful and not beautiful. (From now on we shall take it that the qualifications 'at the same time and in the same respect' are understood as a part and parcel of the subject of the judgement.) And one cannot say that this is beautiful and ugly (that is, this at-the-same-time-and-in the-same-respect).

(2) We have already seen that the predicates of literary judgements cannot all be interchangeable and synonymous, and as in the case of 'beautiful' and 'ugly') they may even be mutually incompatible. This puts a constraint on the likelihood of disputes. Not all disputes are equally likely. It is easy enough to imagine an exchange of the following sort —

It is beautiful. — No, it isn't, it is merely pretty.

It is pretty. — I'd rather say that it is dainty.

It is tragic. — No, it is not tragic, but pathetic.

It is a short novel. — No, it is a long short story.

It is moving. — No, it is just sentimental.

But disputes of the following sort are possible, but far less likely.

It is beautiful. — No, it isn't, it is ugly.

It is tragic. — No, it is farcical.

It is a novel. — No, it is a play.

It is moving. — No, it is just a cold statement.

(3) We have already seen that a literary judgement can be comparative. If one says 'A is more beautiful than B' then one is claiming that if B is beautiful then A most certainly is. This raises the expectation that the claim that both A and B are beautiful is less likely to provoke the counterclaim that B is beautiful but A isn't than the counterclaim that neither A nor B is beautiful or that A is beautiful but B isn't. One may even look for a self-contradiction underlying a judgement that B is beautiful but A isn't. So here is another constraint on the likelihood of disputes.

A corollary follows. One may find oneself saying that if *Mona Lisa* is not beautiful then nothing is or that if *King Lear* is not a tragedy then nothing is. In that case one is claiming that *Mona Lisa* or *King Lear* is a touchstone. Aesthetic touchstones are comparable to cultural prototypes (such as a 'prototypical' Petrarchan sonnet); and impressionistic touchstones are comparable to perceptual standards. That such touchstones emerge in the course of history (this is the so-called 'verdict of time' in the domain of art) strengthens the presumption that the felt impasse is not impassable, that there is a way out.

(4) If one comes across a literary judgement made by anyone, one can make reasonable guesses about that person's other literary judgements. If one finds in actuality that most of these guesses are going wrong in the case of a certain person, one may judge such a person to be erratic in taste or lacking in taste. One may even begin to suspect the authenticity of these judgements ('He obviously doesn't mean it when he says that B is beautiful and A is ugly'). In any case one if ruling such a person out of court—he is not fit to be a party to a literary argument, he is not to be taken seriously.

(5) If one comes across a set of literary judgements by one person, one can make a reasonable guess that other like-minded persons are likely to share all or at least most of these judgements. Like-mindedness may be shared literary sensibility, shared literary tradition, shared communal life. In the case of impressionistic judgements, one may even hope to see like-mindedness in shared humanity.

Moralities differ, but every society has one. Members of a society differ from one another in their moralities, but differ within limits. Substitute 'literary sensibilities' for 'moralities' and the observations still hold good. To the extent that a given literary sensibility yields consistent, even coherent literary judgements, it has crystallized into a critical position, an aesthetic ideology.

The notion of a literary sensibility is preferred here to certain other comparable notions such as the notion of the author of a set of literary judgements or the traditional notion of literary taste. Consider how the same person may shift in his literary judgements at different periods in his life (in youth and in maturity, before and after a cultural 'conversion') or even in different mental states (relaxed and self-conscious, in town and back home at the village—a difference that is comparable to Sunday-best and weekday morality among some Christians). Again, a literary dispute between two sensibilities will be more substantial and more difficult to resolve than a literary dispute within the same literary sensibility shared by two persons. Finally, literary judgements may enter the creative process no less than the receptive process. A critic lies concealed not only in the ordinary recipient but also in the literary artist. Only, in these two the judgements may remain implicit, even tacit rather than become explicit. The notion of literary sensibility alone is flexible enough to meet all such situations.

To sum up, the impasse of literary judgement is not impassable.

There is a way from specificity to generality : literary works are comparable and intertextual. Single works add up to bodies of literature. There is a way from subjectivity to intersubjectivity and even a degree of objectivity : literary sensibilities are comparable and participative. Single judgements add up to critical positions.

Let us follow these two trails in turn.

II-B.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.... You cannot value him alone ; you must see him, for contrast and comparison among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism.... What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.

—T. S. Eliot (1919)

What makes a body of literature ? What makes a literary corpus ? A literary corpus may be recognized at various levels—

the literary collection, such as the *R̥gveda Samhitā*, an Athenian trilogy (three tragedies to be followed by a satyrplay), the Greek Anthology, Bhartṛhari's *Śatakṭrayam*, Shakespeare's sequence of 154 sonnets ; the collected works of a single author, such as the Shakespeare canon, the *gāthā* of Tukaram, the *kulliyāt* of Ghalib ;

the historically and generically defined corpus, such as the Gothic novel (of early 19th-century Britain), the German Romantics (with their poetry and prose), the *chāyāvādī kavītā* (second quarter of the 20th century in Hindi) ;

the geographically and linguistically defined national literature, such as English and American literatures (united by the sea and divided by language, if one is to believe Bernard Shaw), the Indo-Persian literature (of 12th-17th centuries A.D.), the Hindi-heritage literature (Old Maithili, Old Avadhi, Old Braj, Old Khari Boli of 13th century-early 19th century passim, the 'creation' of Ramachandru Varma the literary historian critic) ;

the literature of a civilization, such as Western literature, Islamic literature, Medieval Indian literature.

Historically this recognition, with various degrees and modes of conven-

tional sanction, may come through authorial intent, biographical accident, editorial effort, efforts of translators and adapters, the emergence of a more or less partially shared reading public, the emergence of a group or at least a community of writers, linguistic affinity and linguistic distance, the presence of a common folklore or mythology or ideology, a shared 'classical heritage', or shared history. What matters in critical terms is the presence of shared intertextuality (allusive, quotations, imitations, influences, contrary reactions, traditions, experiments, pendulum swings, and the like) and of shared models and patterns (literary figure such as metaphor, allegory, parallelism ; literary forms such as sonnet, ghazal, epigram, proverb, joke ; literary motifs such as damsel in distress, reluctant hero, lament for past glory ; literary motives such as the heroic, the erotic, the marvellous, the devotional ; literary genres such as short story, novella, lyric, tragedy, epic, etc. ; literary kinds such as prose of ideas, closet drama, song). These two ensure a sharing of sensibility through setting constraints on what the author intends, how the recipient responds, what the two expect from each other, and what the two expect from the work that is taking shape between them.

It is customary to speak of comparative literary study as a special mode of literary study. If the present argument holds, it will be seen that *all* literary study is comparative in intent and accomplishment in that it seeks to transcend the irreducible specificity of the literary judgement by recognizing the intertextuality and the comparability of literary works. Comparing two poetic traditions is only in continuity with comparing two poetic genres, comparing two poets, and comparing two poems. Comparing across two poetic traditions is not different in kind from comparing within a single poetic tradition. The only constraint on the legitimacy of a literary comparison is the density of intertextuality and the degree of comparability.

So much for the transcendence of specificity. (Transcendence, not reduction.) Now for the transcendence of subjectivity.

II-C.

A judgement is personal or it is nothing, you cannot take over someone else's. The implicit form of a judgement is : This is so isn't it ?

— F. R. Leavis (1972 : p. 62)

It is certain my conviction gains infinitely the moment another will believe in it.

— Novalis, cited as epigraph to Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim*

Let us begin by making a simple but very helpful distinction — between offering a definition, offering a reason, and offering an explanation in the course of a literary argument —

(1) Earlier we established a distinction between three kinds of literary judgements on the basis of three kinds of literary predicates — aesthetic, critical, and impressionistic ascriptions. A literary predicate can be defined if at all only in terms of other literary predicates of the same kind. An argument of the following kind is valid —

This has unity.

This has diversity.

Therefore, this has unity in diversity.

Here all the three predicates are critical predicates. An argument of the following kind is not valid —

This has unity in diversity.

To be beautiful is to have unity in diversity.

Therefore this is beautiful.

The second premise cannot be accepted, as a definition equating beauty, an aesthetic predicate, with unity in diversity, a critical predicate.

(2) But how about the following ?

This is beautiful. Why ?

Because this has unity in diversity.

Here we are offering a critical judgement as a reason in support of an aesthetic judgement. To accept such a reason is to accept a critical insight.

(3) And how about the following ?

This has unity in diversity. How ?

Because this is felt to be compact and its diversity is diversity within certain limits.

Here we are offering an impressionistic judgement by way of an explanation for the occurrence of a critical judgement. To accept such an explanation is to accept a technical insight. Let us now return to the problem presented by the irreducible subjectivity of the literary judgement.

To begin with, we have aesthetic exclamations (This is Beautiful !). Such an exclamation may give rise to —

(1) An aesthetic report (This is found to be beautiful),

(2) An aesthetic judgement (This deserves to be found beautiful).

The two are linked by an invitation (I invite you to see that this is beautiful. Isn't that beautiful ?). The invitation marks the passage from (1) to (2).

An aesthetic report calls for an explanation of the following sort :

So-and-so finds this to be beautiful because so-and-so has inclinations, a make-up of a certain sort which is impressionistically judged or naturalistically described to be such-and-such. This explanation may or may not be convincing. If it is, that's because we are accepting a generalization of the following sort :

Persons of a certain make-up, a certain personal and social identity find works judged or described to be of a certain sort beautiful.

This is an explanatory generalization.

Alternatively, an aesthetic judgement calls for not an explanation but a reason of the following sort :

So-and-so judges this to be beautiful (or finds this deserving to be beautiful) for a reason flowing from so-and-so having sensibilities and a taste, or adopting strategies and a stance, of a certain sort which is critically statable as such-and-such.

This reason may or may not be convincing. If it is, in accepting it we are accepting a generalization of the following sort :

Persons with a certain taste or stance find works critically judged to be of a certain sort beautiful.

This is a reason-providing generalization

These literary generalizations by offering explanations for the fact of a literary judgement or, alternatively, by offering reasons for a literary judgement let us transcend (but not reduce) the essential egocentric, ethnocentric, or anthropocentric subjectivity of literary judgements.

II-D. Where does the literary subject (understood here as the author of a literary judgement with a certain sensibility) look for reasons in defending his literary judgement in respect of a given literary object (understood here as the literary work being responded to) ?

If the literary subject looks into his own personal and social identity, he is mistaking explanations for the judgement to be its reasons – in other words, he is committing the affective fallacy of identifying the object with the way it affects the subject or (what comes to the same thing) identifying the literary judgement with the genesis of that judgement in the private and personal encounter with the object.

If the literary subject looks into the personal and social identity of the author of the literary work, he is mistaking explanations for the generation of the object to be the reasons for its aesthetic/critical/impression-

istic status—in other words, he is committing the intentional fallacy of identifying the object of judgement with its genesis in the artist's intentions.

It should be apparent that both the affective fallacy and the intentional fallacy are examples of the genetic fallacy. I am of course borrowing the expressions from Wimsatt and Beardsley (1949, 1946)—the ideas going back at least to Eliot (respectively 1923, 1919). I only hope that my reformulation avoids some of the pitfalls in the earlier formulations and is less liable to being misconstrued. Perhaps to prevent confusion the present reformulations may be called the doctrines of affective-genetic fallacy and intentional-genetic fallacy.

There is one more fallacy which has been recognized by many but which hasn't been given a name. If the literary subject seeks to derive the literary judgement from some 'first principles' of criticism, he has lost sight of the irreducible specificity and subjectivity of literary judgements—in other words, he is committing the applicative fallacy of identifying the object with a pigeon-hole in some preconceived schema that is being applied. (Literary objects can't be so identified, in them Hegel's notion of the concrete universal finds an exemplification.)

It is singularly unfortunate, therefore, that the term 'applied criticism' is still in use and that the term 'practical criticism' is still understood as the practical application of some principles rather than simply taken to be a somewhat misleading synonym for 'critical practice'. There is no 'applied criticism' and there are no 'critical first principles'. There is only a dialectical interplay between critical practice and critical and technical insights. Such an interplay clearly shows that critical activity is simply observant participation in literary interaction, in the literary life of the community (cf. Kelkar 1977): it is insightful appreciation and not the predictable exercise of a critical position. A critical position is not a set body of proposed first principles, rather it is a body of evolving critical and technical insights (that is, generalizations that are currently accepted by the critic). The saying "Consistency is the virtue of an ass" is particularly appropriate in the area of critical practice.

No matter what his critical position is, a literary subject must steer clear of the affective-genetic fallacy, the intentional-genetic fallacy, and the applicative fallacy. These three are not some paper tigers floated by formalist critics. Any literary subject, formalist or not, succumbing to them is simply trying to reduce (rather than transcend) the irreducible

specificity and irreducible subjectivity of literary judgement, and necessarily failing in that enterprise.

In recognizing that literary judgements are irreducibly subjective, we recognize that literary predicates and literary insights are individually acquired through direct acquaintance with literary objects. But then in recognizing that literary judgements are unavoidably persuasive we further recognize that literary predicates and literary insights need to be socially ratified. (By 'literary insights' are understood here both critical insights and technical insights as defined earlier in II-C. Explanatory generalizations are an entirely different matter and are being excluded in this context.) It may be noted in passing that, while literary predicates and literary insights are individually acquired and socially ratified, ethical predicates and insights probably operate on quite different lines in that they are probably socially acquired and individually ratified.

To sum up, literary criticism and technical analysis of literature (the latter of course in close association with the former) are feasible in spite of the irreducible specificity and subjectivity of literary judgements because these two features are transcended respectively through the unavoidably comparative and persuasive dimensions of literary judgements. These latter two features permit the crystallization of critical positions in the shape of critical insights and technical insights.

And of course there are several plausible critical positions (for an exploration of these see Kelkar 1983).

III. *The Metacritical Problem*

Some overhasty and over-'sensitive' critics have a habit of creating a new aesthetic as soon as any new kind of writing appears.... If we derive the aesthetic criteria of a particular trend from the works belonging to this trend, they have ceased to be criteria. And an aesthetic which is afraid to approach the question of criteria, of the rightness of a particular trend or genre has abdicated from aesthetics.

— Georg Lukács (1962 : p. 363, quoted in Pradhan 1980)

...I desire to avoid dogmatism even in opposing dogmatism. It is of extreme importance to recognize not merely the relativity of taste, but what one may call its absoluteness in reference to a particular individual at a particular time.... We shall trust ourselves, as we trust our own eyes and ears : while on the other hand, unless we

wish to reduce our whole social life to chaos, we shall be willing to allow others to trust themselves.

— E. E. Kellett (1981, quoted in Heyl 1943 : 89)

III-A. In coping with the impasse arising out of the specificity and subjectivity of literary judgements by recognizing their comparative and persuasive dimensions, we have opened the door for a multiplicity of critical positions from which to make literary judgements. The only way to argue about literary works is to oppose literary judgement to literary judgement and to support one literary judgement with another more general literary judgement. Critical argumentation is primarily a matter of finding definitions and reasons, only secondarily a matter of finding explanations. In any case it is *not* a matter of offering conclusive proofs, still less providing them. (We can regard technical insights about literature as but an integral part of literary critical activity. Stylistics is not a branch of linguistic science, it is a branch of literary criticism—offering definitions, reasons, explanations linking critical judgements to impressionistic judgements.)

This inevitably leads us to a point where we are called upon to make judgements about literary judgements, to offer criticism of literary criticism, to choose between the multiplicity of critical positions. How do we go about doing this ? *That* is the metacritical problem. To offer solutions to the metacritical problems is to take up metacritical positions regarding the choice between critical positions.

When we argue in terms of explanations we explain the assigning of an aesthetic/critical/impressionistic predicate to a literary work or literary object in terms respectively of critical/impressionistic/naturalistic predicates assignable to the literary object and the inclinations and make-up assignable to the literary subject. In short—

Literary predicate is seen as a function of the literary object and the personal and social identity of the literary subject.

When we argue in terms of reasons we ground the assigning of an aesthetic/critical/impressionistic predicate to a literary object in terms respectively of critical/impressionistic/naturalistic predicates assignable to the literary object and the sensibilities and taste assignable to the literary subject. In short—

Literary predicate is seen as a function of the literary object and the taste of the literary subject.

In either case the literary judgement is bound by the literary object

and the literary subject. It is irreducibly specific and irreducibly subjective. Let us say it has an object bondage and a subject bondage. The object bondage may be—

- (i) maximum : this object here and now,
- (ii) medium : this object belonging to this genre or tradition or period,
- (iii) minimum : this object belonging to the world of man.

The subject bondage, in turn, may be—

- (i) maximum : this subject here and now,
- (ii) medium : this subject belonging to this community of subjects,
- (iii) minimum : this subject belonging to this mankind.

(The nineteenth-century English saying 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder' is a proverbial recognition of maximum subject bondage.)

III-B. To choose a metacritical position is to choose the degree of object bondage and of subject bondage—that is to say, to decide as to how much one ought to seek to transcend the specificity and subjectivity of literary judgements. Obviously the greater these bondages the lesser the transcendence of the impasse brought on by the specificity and subjectivity of literary judgements.

Broadly speaking there are three metacritical positions (for an earlier but somewhat less adequate formulation of these see Heyl 1943 : Part II)—

- (1) critical anarchism with maximum object bondage and maximum subject bondage,
- (2) critical relativism with either object bondage reduced to medium or subject bondage reduced to medium or both,
- (3) critical absolutism with minimum object bondage and minimum subject bondage.

(Other terms have been suggested—subjectivism or pluralism for anarchism and objectivism or monism for absolutism ; but presently it will be seen that these terms are inexact and so infelicitous. Incidentally, Heyl calls the three positions respectively subjectivism, relativism, and objectivism.)

The point is that the choice of the metacritical position has to do not only with the question as to how far the subjectivity of the literary judgement is transcendable but as much with the question as to how far the specificity of the literary judgement is transcendable. The twin questions

are : (a) Can criticism be objective or even intersubjective ? (b) Can criticism be abstractive or even semiabstractive ? In any case, all three positions have to accept that literary predicates selected do actually vary both object-wise, i.e. in accordance with the literary sensibility and critical position of the recipient responding to the work. The actual variation is a fact of life, so to say. But they differ in their assessment of this variation in literary judgements. They don't offer to pick out from alternate literary judgements, they are not critical positions. Being metacritical positions, they merely take a stance towards the multiplicity of actual critical positions. (Once again it will be worth reminding oneself that literary judgements may be text-interpretative no less than evaluative. The metacritical positions are as much concerned with text-interpretation as they are with evaluation.)

Critical anarchism says that literary judgements not only do vary object-wise but ought to so vary. In other words, there is one and only one valid judgement for every object-subject dyad. Critical anarchism accepts maximum object-bondage and maximum subject-bondage. (The word 'subjectivism' as sometimes applied to it will thus be seen to be a misnomer, unless we are thinking of critical anarchism that has succumbed to the affective-genetic fallacy. The word 'pluralism' is also inexact in that it could and often does apply to critical relativism as well.) Critical anarchism expects near-congruence between liking and approving, between personal and social identity of the subject and his taste. But it does not expect near-congruence between the descriptive predicates assignable to the object with the ascriptive literary predicates assignable to it. Critical anarchism holds that all interpretations are valid. (The Medieval Latin saying 'De gustibus et coloribus non est disputandum' is a proverbial recognition of critical anarchism.)

Critical relativism holds that literary judgements ought to vary object-wise and subject-wise within limits (i.e. so long as they don't lapse into arbitrariness and eccentricity). Critical relativism accepts either medium object-bondage or medium subject-bondage or both. Indeed one has to recognize three subvarieties of critical relativism :

- (a) subject-oriented : maximum subject bondage and medium object bondage ; some interpretations are implausible, the rest being valid ;
- (b) neutral : medium object and subject bondage ; some interpretations are valid and some invalid ;

- (c) object-oriented : maximum object bondage and medium subject bondage ; some interpretations are invalid, the rest being plausible.

Critical relativism expects only partial congruence between liking and approving, between the personal and social identity of the subject and his taste, and between the descriptive predicates assignable to the object and the ascriptive literary predicates assignable to it. (The seventeenth-century English proverb 'It takes all sorts to make a world' will be an appropriate motto for a critical relativist.)

Critical absolutism holds that literary judgements ought not to vary either subject-wise or object-wise. In other words, there is only one valid judgement for every object no matter who the subject is and there is only one valid literary generalization for every subject no matter what the object is. Critical absolutism accepts minimum object bondage and minimum subject bondage. (The word 'objectivism' as sometimes applied to it will thus be seen to be a misnomer. The word 'monism' is infelicitous in that it suggests that there are only two metacritical positions—as we have just seen, there are actually five, 1+3+1.) Critical absolutism expects near-congruence between right judgement and mature and unspoiled taste and does not expect even near-congruence between liking and approving. Any departure from the right ascriptive judgement is dismissed as impressionistic judgement and attributed to immaturity or debauching of taste. Critical absolutism holds that there is one valid interpretation, the rest being invalid. (The classical Sanskrit notion of *adhikāra*, 'authority based on competence', fits well with critical absolutism.)

It will be useful at this point to spell out the relationship between the three fallacies described earlier in Section II-D and the five metacritical positions described just now. Anarchism and subject-oriented relativism are apt to fall into the genetic-affective fallacy, though they could very well steer clear of it. Anarchism and object-oriented relativism are apt to fall into the genetic-intentional fallacy, though they could very well steer clear of it. Absolutism and neutral relativism are apt to fall into the applicative fallacy, though they could very well steer clear of it. Any literary judgement has to be authentic, but the grounds offered in order to validate it have to be rooted in a sensibility if they are to be taken seriously. Absolutism and neutral relativism merely point out that authenticity does not guarantee validity. On the other hand anarchism and subject-oriented relativism insist that there can be more than one validating sensibility.

Again, any literary judgement has to be specific, but the grounds offered in order to validate it have to be rooted in a literary generalization if they are to be taken seriously. Absolutism and neutral relativism merely point out that specificity does not guarantee validity. On the other hand anarchism and object-oriented relativism insist that there can be more than one validating criterion: a literary generalization valid for an object belonging to a genre, tradition, or period need not be valid for an object belonging to a different genre, tradition, or period.

The question at issue is whether out of the many possible and possibly even many plausible points of view there can be only one point of vantage (absolutism), or many points of vantage within limits (relativism), or only one point of vantage—the point of view that appeals to the subject (anarchism). Adapting and extrapolating from an earlier discussion of this more general question (Weiler 1976) one could present the issue in some such terms.

The philosopher-observer (as in the Hegelian system) is credited with the only current point of view—the other points of view being mistaken, at best merely plausible. Discussion is designed only for removing the error. In Leibnizian terms, he is God-like in his awareness of the pre-established harmony of the plenum. The conviction that there is a world by itself strengthens the hope that one can rise above diverse points of view. (This is absolutism.)

But to have an at least partially inalienable position is to be an individual and respond to an individual with respect to the available view. The point of view may be defined by special access (hence specificity) or by special interest (hence subjectivity). If it settles into a set bias, rational discussion is ruled out. (This is anarchism.)

Recognizing points of view other than one's own is an invitation to open-ended rational discussion, to join a sort of intellectual democracy. But of course as soon as one qualifies a claim as a claim from a specific point of view (his, your, our, my...), then necessarily one thereby weakens the force of that claim, undermines the position or system even as one postulates it. (This is relativism. The weakening is seen when one passes from an aesthetic judgement to an aesthetic report—from 'This is so' to 'I find this so'.)

One may also note in passing that the moment relativism hedges from the need to choose a clear point of view no matter how agonizing the resulting rejections may prove to be, the moment relativism recommends

instead a search for moderation, synthesis, the golden mean, relativism turns into neutral relativism. But this need not happen, relativism may remain tough-minded enough to accept the need for a clear, even agonizing choice. That would be non-neutral, subject-oriented or object-oriented relativism, relativism of special interest or relativism of special access.

Before we proceed to take up considerations that have a bearing on the choice of the metacritical position, let me offer a set of terms for use in modern Indian languages—

anarchism	<i>anāgraha</i>
relativism	<i>mitāgraha</i>
subject-oriented	<i>vṛttilakṣī</i>
neutral	<i>śuddha</i>
object-oriented	<i>vastulakṣī</i>
absolutism	<i>satyāgraha</i> (or <i>adhyāgraha</i>)

III-C. Obviously we are not going to tolerate at this point an infinite regress of the following sort—the choice between critical positions is a metacritical problem, the metacritical solution offers certain metacritical positions, the choice between metacritical positions is a metametacritical problem, the metametacritical solution offers certain metametacritical positions, etc., etc. Fortunately such a regress does not present itself at this point. The choice between metacritical positions brings in considerations that also have a relevance to higher-order problems. Literary arguments call for more literary judgements, and not for more and more abstract theories. Let us now make a rapid survey of various relevant considerations that strengthen or weaken the case for the various metacritical positions. No distinction will be made between explanations and reasons for adopting these positions.

(1) The desire for consistency in critical discourse strengthens absolutism. But the recognition of unresolvable contradictions strengthens relativism. (Consistency may be asinine but inconsistency is all too human, it may even be divine.) Anarchism seeks to meet both the demands somehow or other. Some may even call it a counsel of despair or an easy way out.

(2) The recognition of a discontinuity between literary creation and literary reception strengthens absolutism. But the desire to make reception a form of recreation, if not subcreation, if not cocreation favours relativism if not anarchism.

(3) Interpretative literary judgements may be exegetic (for whose purposes absolutism is plausible), hermeneutic (for whose purposes relativism is plausible), or homiletic (for whose purposes anarchism is plausible.) (For the three levels of literary interpretations see Kelkar 1985.)

(4) The desire for continuity between descriptive statements and ascriptive judgements and between explanations and reasons in critical discourse favours anarchism. But the recognition of a discontinuity between facts and interpretations-of-facts favours absolutism. Relativism seeks to meet both the demands somehow or other.

(5) The recognition of continuity between the world *in* literature and the 'real' world favours absolutism. The recognition of discontinuity between them also favours absolutism. Attempts to meet both the demands move away from absolutism.

(6) The recognition of the irreducible specificity of the literary judgement leads to a move towards anarchism. The immediacy of the object favours absolutism or even anarchism. The recognition of the comparative dimension of the literary judgement favours object-oriented relativism. Object-oriented relativism will recognize that our critical position may have to shift in moving from one body of literature (literary collection, the collected works of an author, a historically and generically defined corpus, a national literature, or the literature of a civilization) to another in order to understand the work better and consequently to be in a better position to be 'fair' to it. Such a shift may especially be called for if the literary community of the recipient and the literary community of the author of the work are different and separated by time, geography, or social grouping. (This last is critical relativism motivated by cultural relativism.) Indeed one may make a distinction between responding to a work with the recipient enjoying an inwardness, even an involvement (whether inherited or acquired) with the body of literature on the one hand (this is the endocentric response) and responding to a work with the recipient taking up an attitude that is rooted elsewhere or an altogether detached attitude (whether inherited or acquired) towards the body of literature on the other hand (this is the exocentric response). Anarchism or absolutism goes with the endocentric response ; relativism goes with the exocentric response. Both kinds of response may yield their special insights and serve as a basis of literary translation and adaptation.

(7) The recognition of the irreducible subjectivity of literary judgement leads to a move towards anarchism. The privacy of creation or

encounter favours absolutism or even anarchism. (See Appendix.) The recognition of the persuasive dimension of literary judgement favours subject-oriented relativism. Subject-oriented relativism will recognize that our critical position may have to shift in moving from works inspired by a certain mode of sensibility to works inspired by another mode of sensibility in order to understand the work better and consequently to be in a better position to be 'fair' to it. Ordinarily, however, the immediacy of the authentic literary response makes it difficult for the unsophisticated recipient to refrain from anarchism (I know what I like) or absolutism (of course what I find is out there). One can no more doubt one's gut-feeling about an art object than one could doubt one's perceptual judgement.

(8) The recognition of continuity between the world of literary activity (creation and reception and criticism) and the 'practical' world is typical of the amateur, the 'layman' in literary matters. The amateur is all for the spontaneity that anarchism encourages. The recognition of discontinuity between the world of literary activity and the 'practical' world is typical of the professional, the 'insider' in literary matters who values a maturing of sensibilities and taste and a search for strategies and a stance. The insider may be the academic whose detachment goes better with relativism or the intensely involved whose involvement as critic or artist goes better with absolutism. Occasionally, however, one comes across a Goethe or a Shakespeare whose 'negative capability' (to use Keats's justly celebrated phrase) enables him to move from one mode of sensibility to another with an enviable ease. Have they any counterparts among critics?

(9) Any literary tradition that aspires to a continuity in literary activity over an appreciable length of time has to facilitate three things—
 entry of the really new,
 exit of the worn out, and
 storage of the enduring.

Relativism with its openness tends to favour entry of the really new—especially experimental elitist work or vigorous, even barbarous popular (or populist) work. Anarchism with its uncompromising insistence on not approving what one does not like tends to favour exit of the worn out—especially decadent elitist work (the merely correct or the merely chic) or regressive popular work (the kitsch). Absolutism with its insistence on continuity tends to favour storage—especially of the innovative

and the celebrative within the tradition, yielding a repertory of major classics and minor classics.

The weakness of relativism can be a failure to ensure the exit of the merely correct work or the merely chic work. The weakness of anarchism can be a failure to afford entry to the genuine but difficult work (approving which often precedes its understanding and/or liking). The weakness of absolutism can be a failure to ensure the exit of the merely correct work and to afford entry to the genuinely experimental work and the vigorous, even barbarous popular work.

(10) One consequence of the continuity between the world of literary activity and the 'practical' world is the likelihood of a certain 'learning transfer' (in either direction) between the literary participant's metacritical position and his sociopolitical philosophy. Anarchism goes with the open society (*Gesellschaft*), the prizing of liberty, the advocacy of non-aggression (the Dutch proverb 'Live and let live', the Jain epistemic maxim *syāt*, 'could be', as an expression of intellectual *ahimsā*), subversive behaviour, and alienation from the in-group. Relativism goes with the open society (*Gesellschaft*), the prizing of equality, the advocacy of cosmopolitanism, and conciliatory strategy. Absolutism goes with the closed society (*Gemeinschaft*), the prizing of internal fraternity and security, the advocacy of nativism, conformative behaviour, and confrontative strategy.

If one takes due cognizance of all these considerations, one could make out a case in turn for critical anarchism, critical relativism, or critical absolutism. If one simultaneously finds these three metacritical positions plausible and 'useful', then one has ipso facto embraced critical relativism. (One need not postulate a metametacritical level for that !)

It will be of some interest to compare the realm of aesthetic values with the realm of ethical values and the realm of political values. Such comparisons will reveal different 'bridges' between the world of facts and the worlds of values — worlds, since there are more than one world of value. Descriptions and ascriptions will then be seen to be good neighbours in spite of some resolute philosophic moves to sunder them.

APPENDIX

At III-C (7) we have said, "The privacy of creation or encounter favours absolutism or even anarchism." Creation is here included along with the recipient's encounter with the work since literary sensibility or taste involves both processes : there is a critic lurking in the author of the work no less than its recipient.

In some communities most literary artists operate within a tradition which they accept implicitly—at the metacritical level such artists are very likely to accept absolutism. In some communities most literary artists have to beat their own path—at the metacritical level such artists are very likely to accept anarchism.

Here is a vivid account of the process (Wilbur 1949, quoted by Mehrotra 1980 : pp. 18-19) : "In order to write in earnest it is necessary to choose and to make a way of writing, and this involves rejecting other ways of writing, past and present. In some writers this rejection encompasses almost the entire body of literature, and that is perfectly healthy. Very few good writers can afford to admit the existence of 'literature' as critics mean that term. The critic ... has the privilege of seeing the good in everything. But in proportion as a poet sees the good in everything, his own work is likely—just likely—to lack focus and character. His attitudes toward other poets, and toward critical notions about writing poems, will probably be extreme, and are bound to be intimately connected with his own projects.... The younger French poets of today have made Valéry into a blacker villain than he could be ; this is a necessary piece of personal strategy and has to do with safeguarding the novelty and the integrity of the poem each will write tomorrow."

Consider also the following shrewd observation by Auden (1956 : 11-12) : "If an undergraduate announces to his tutor one morning that Gertrude Stein is the greatest writer who ever lived or that Shakespeare is no good, he is really only saying something like this : 'I don't know what to write yet or how, but yesterday while reading Gertrude Stein, I thought I saw a clue' or 'Reading Shakespeare yesterday, I realized that one of the faults in what I write is a tendency to rhetoric bombast.'"

In Classical Sanskrit literary life there are frequent allusions to the poets' intense jealousies about each other. While these are no doubt to be traced in part to their being rivals for the patronage of royalty and aristocracy, there is a strong possibility that they may also in part to be traced

to the creative need for an anarchistic stance of intolerance within an essentially absolutist literary community.

This Appendix should indicate the sort of exploration and elaboration that is needed to lend body to the somewhat abstract formulations scattered throughout the text—especially the generalizations in Section III-C.

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